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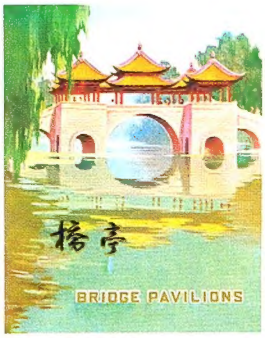

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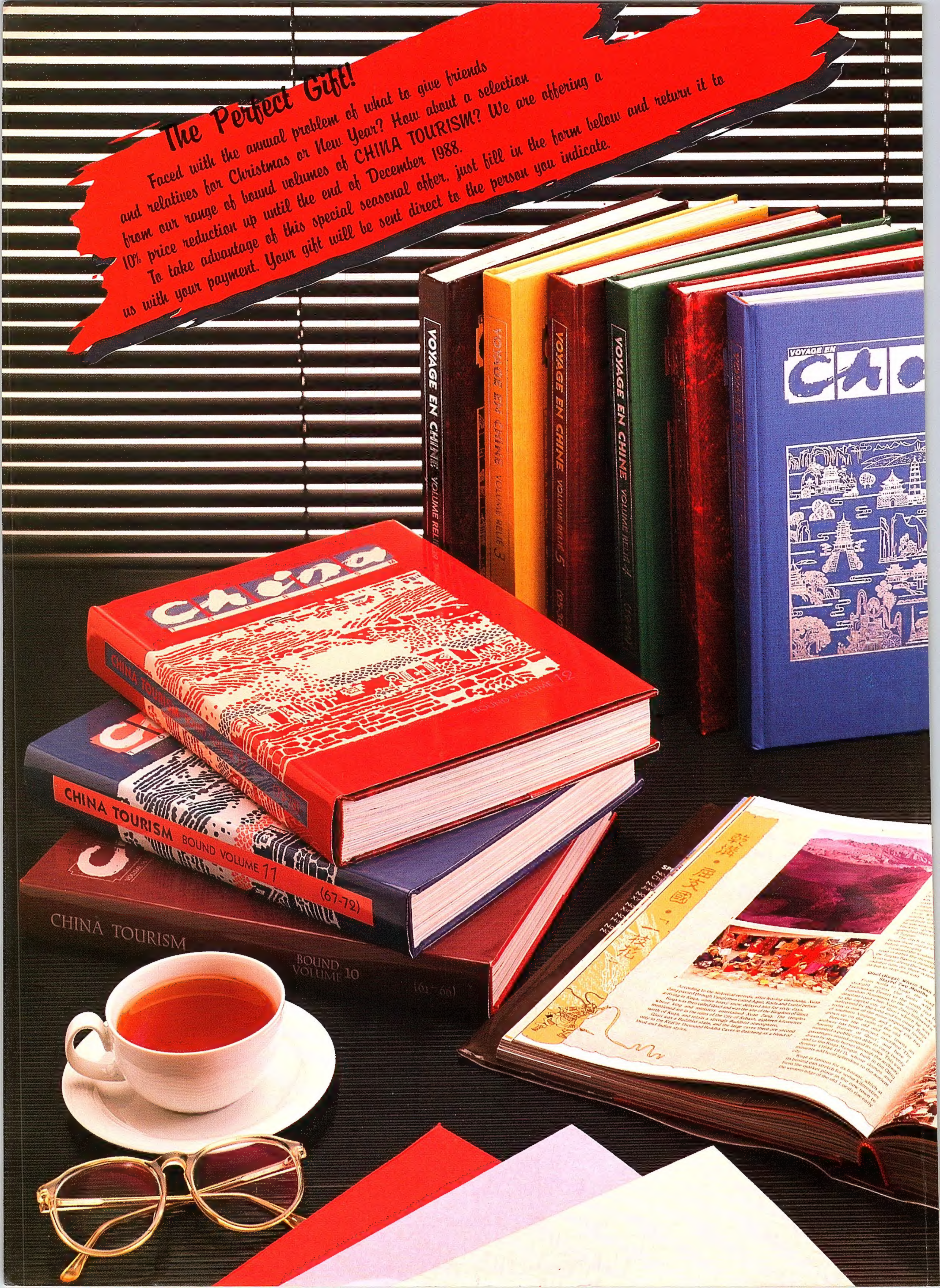
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EDITORIAL

China: Never-Ending Source of Inspiration

In the very early days of CHINA TOURISM, after just a dozen or so issues, a few voices were heard to wonder how we would manage to keep going, given the 'limited nature' of our subject matter.

The 100th issue of the English edition is now in your hands, and — whatever other hurdles we have had to overcome — we have had no problem in finding topics. On the contrary, new themes are emerging all the time as China's tourism industry expands and as the country opens up generally. The point is that, although tourism and travel in China are in themselves fascinating subjects which deserve to be explored in depth, they also cover a multitude of other aspects: Chinese lifestyles, rituals and ceremonies; the beauties of nature; cultural background and historical relics; legends and folk tales; arts and crafts; as well as a plethora of material connected with China's no less than fifty-six nationalities. All this adds up to a truly inexhaustible source of subject matter.

To celebrate this major milestone — our 100th issue — we are presenting a China-wide quintet of articles with the emphasis on adventure to give you some idea of the range of projects now being undertaken. Some of these are tales of great exertions, whether climbing an 8,000-metre mountain in Tibet, braving one of the world's least welcoming deserts in Xinjiang, or jogging eastwards along the Great Wall in inclement weather.

Despite the hardships, these were all carefully organized expeditions. However, we also report on an individual traveller's strenuous trip, by bus and on foot, to the villages of the former head-hunting Va tribe which are tucked into lush vegetation on the slopes of the Awa Mountains in southwestern Yunnan. Another reporter, after sampling stage performances by a bevy of international stars, looks into the history of Chinese acrobatics in the light of the astonishing Hebei town of Wuqiao, where young acrobats still pursue a centuries-old tradition.

Variety is again the name of the game in our secondary articles, which jump from Shanxi to Hainan Island, and include a special anniversary selection of offerings by noted Chinese photographers.

Finally, we can think of no better way to underline the scope of CHINA TOURISM's endeavours than with the enclosed insert, which reproduces the covers of all one hundred issues to date.

Turning to the future, who knows what exciting new discoveries and adventures lie ahead as we embark on the *next* one hundred issues.... Stay with us!

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16 A Feast of Acrobatic Skills With a history of over 2,500 years, acrobatics are deeply rooted in China, and nowhere more than in Wuqiao in Hebei Province, where balancing skills are learnt practically in the cradle.

26 Through the Sea of Death The vast and forbidding Taklimakan Desert in Xinjiang's Tarim Basin, far to the northwest of China, has earned itself many epithets over the centuries; but these have proved no deterrent for those attracted by its very mystery and danger, including a French expedition headed by writer Jacques Lanzmann.

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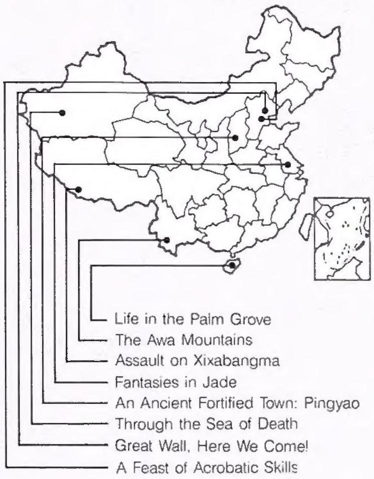

The Awa Mountains — Abode of the Va

PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY XIE SHIXUN

With its dense tropical forests and its high wooded mountains through which some of Southeast Asia's greatest rivers have gouged ravines in their passage, Yunnan Province is the homeland of over twenty minority peoples, each of which has developed its own customs and lifestyle. One of the least-known, because most remote, is the Va, whose main claim to fame is that they were still a head-hunting society as late as the 1940s.

With a population of nearly 300,000 in China, the Va people — who speak a language of the Mon-Khmer branch — are concentrated in the southwest of Yunnan bordering on Burma, specifically in the autonomous counties of Lancang, Ximeng, Cangyuan and Gengma. The rugged peaks which tower over this region sandwiched between the rivers Lancang (Mekong) and Nujiang (Salween) are known collectively as the Awa Mountains. Most Va villages are located on the mountain slopes or on small hilltops. Due to the difficulty of the terrain, few of the villages (referred to as 'stockades', although they no longer seem to be protected by an actual stockade) are even accessible by bus. This means that most Va people to this day continue to lead a traditionally simple, rather primitive, life in more or less complete isolation from the outside world, except for communities near the main roads.

1

Having consulted reference materials and solicited the opinions of friends of mine who originate from the Awa Mountains, I worked out the following itinerary: I would travel from Kunming, capital of Yunnan, to Cangyuan, Menglian and Ximeng, and thence via Lancang to Simao on the newly completed highway, and finally back to Kunming by air. The whole journey would take about one month.

Tobacco-Smoking Va Girls

From Kunming it was a three-day bus ride to Mengdong, seat of the Cangyuan Va Autonomous County. The bus bumped and juddered so violently along the rough mountain tracks that, tough

Portraits of Va market women in Mengdong, displaying their love of silver ornaments (1, 2 and 4); such lengths of bamboo are commonly used to store water (3).

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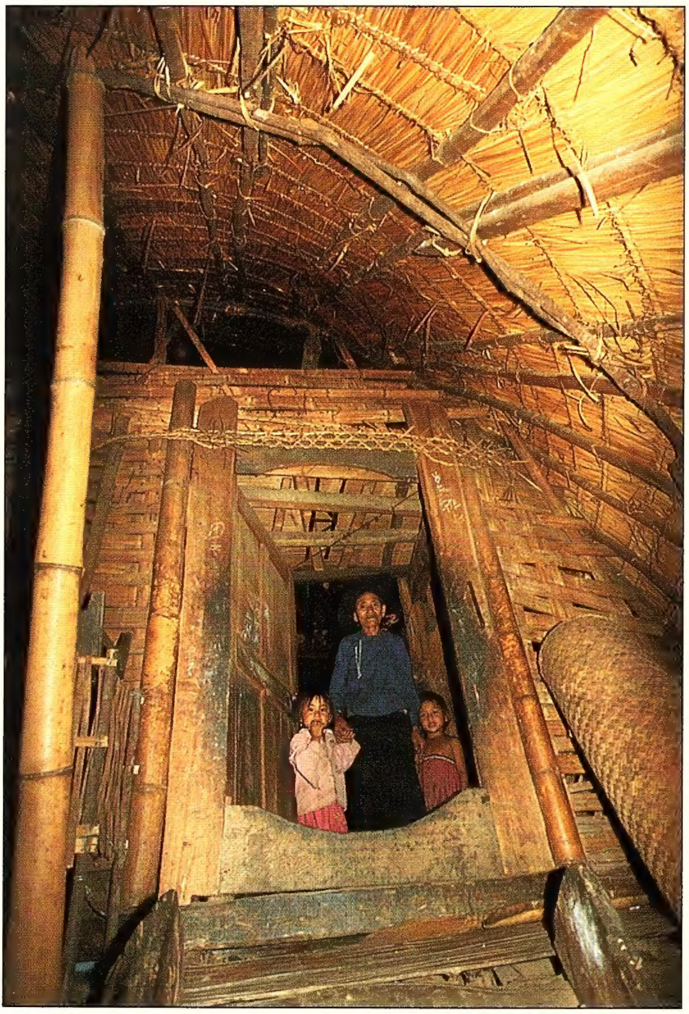

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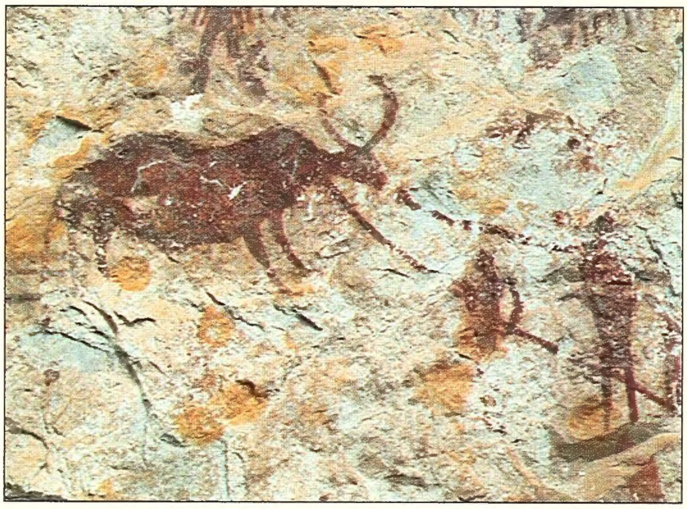

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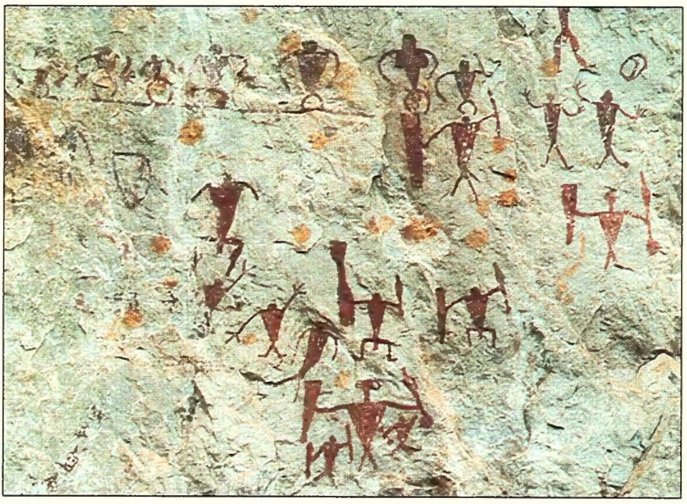

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as I am, it was almost more than I could stand. Once we had entered the Awa Mountains, which are more than two thousand metres above sea-level, we could see nothing but peaks of dark green, their tops sometimes shrouded in mist.

The day we arrived in Mengdong happened to be a market day. The streets were crowded with people, over a thousand at least, most of them Vas who had come down from their villages deep in the mountains, the rest Dais and Burmese from the other side of the border. It was the busy season in farming, otherwise there would have been even more people.

The fair itself — at which rice, tobacco, wine, kerosene, sugar, as well as special native products which I could hardly identify, were being traded — was not my main interest; what arrested my attention were the vendors and stall owners who, without exception, were Vas. Their skin was swarthy, the men strong of build, with bright, piercing eyes suggesting bravery and toughness.

At a street corner I saw several Va girls selling tobacco. Each of them had a colourful scarf wrapped around her head and wore several silver necklaces or necklets, which were rather thick and must have been quite heavy. It seems that all Va people, male or female, old or young, are fond of smoking; even young girls can be seen languidly smoking a long-stemmed pipe.

Head-Hunting Culture on Display

The following day I went to the local Cultural Centre. The man in charge showed me round the exhibition hall, where various stakes and wooden drums were on display, and explained the former head-hunting practices to me.

Va people believe that there are spirits in everything, in mountains, in streams and rivers, in the sun and the moon and, indeed, in every living creature — and these spirits form the objects of their worship. In the past, their mode of agriculture was the ancient slash-and-burn method, which often brought them little to reap. So before sowing and harvesting, they offered a human head and its blood as a sacrifice to the rice deity, sticking the head on a stake planted permanently in a wood outside their stockade in the hope that the rice deity would give them a good harvest. This custom was only abolished in the early 1950s. In addition there were frequent blood feuds, hence the need for the stockaded villages. In this case, too, after every battle, enemy heads would be set on posts to propitiate the gods.

The 'stockade stake', a larger post engraved with all kinds of pictures and images with symbolic meanings, was the tutelar deity of the stockade. Huge wooden drums were a means of communication with the spirit world at sacrificial rites and were used to appease both gods and demons. All these are now cultural relics and of great interest to anthropologists.

My friends in Kunming had strongly recommended that I visit the Greater Banhong Stockade, which is fifty kilometres from Mengdong. Banhong is the name of one of the most powerful tribes of the Va nationality, and the area was known in ancient times as the

A study in harmony — Nuoliang (1). The covered entrance to a Banhong dwelling (2). Ancient rock paintings near Mangyang (3, 4) and Mangyang grandmother and child (5).

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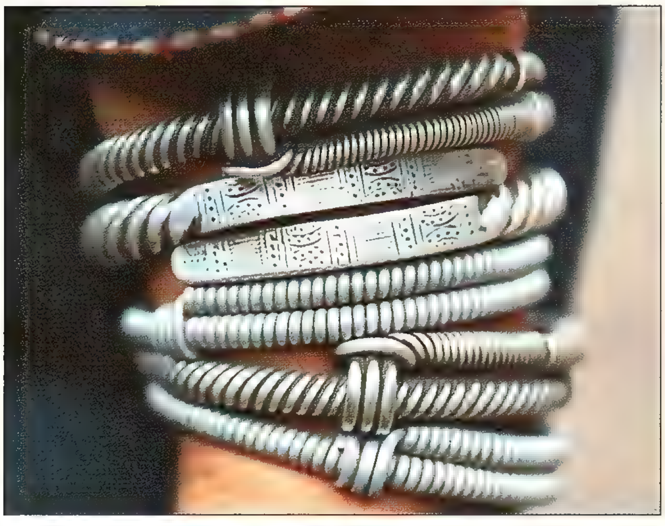

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Gourd Kingdom. A Va legend says that the forebears of mankind were at first imprisoned in a huge gourd from which they were unable to emerge until a sparrow pecked an opening in it. This s why their highest supernatural being is named the Gourd King.

The historically famous Banhong Incident took place there n the 1930s when the Prince of Banhong rose in defence of the border region. While I was there I happened upon Hu Desheng, the last Prince of Banhong, who showed me the big tree under which his ancestors slaughtered an ox to take an oath before the war of resistance began.

The inhabitants of Banhong wear a costume quite similar to that worn by the Dais — their dress and headscarves are less gaudy than those worn by Mengdong people and they do not decorate themselves as much with ornaments.

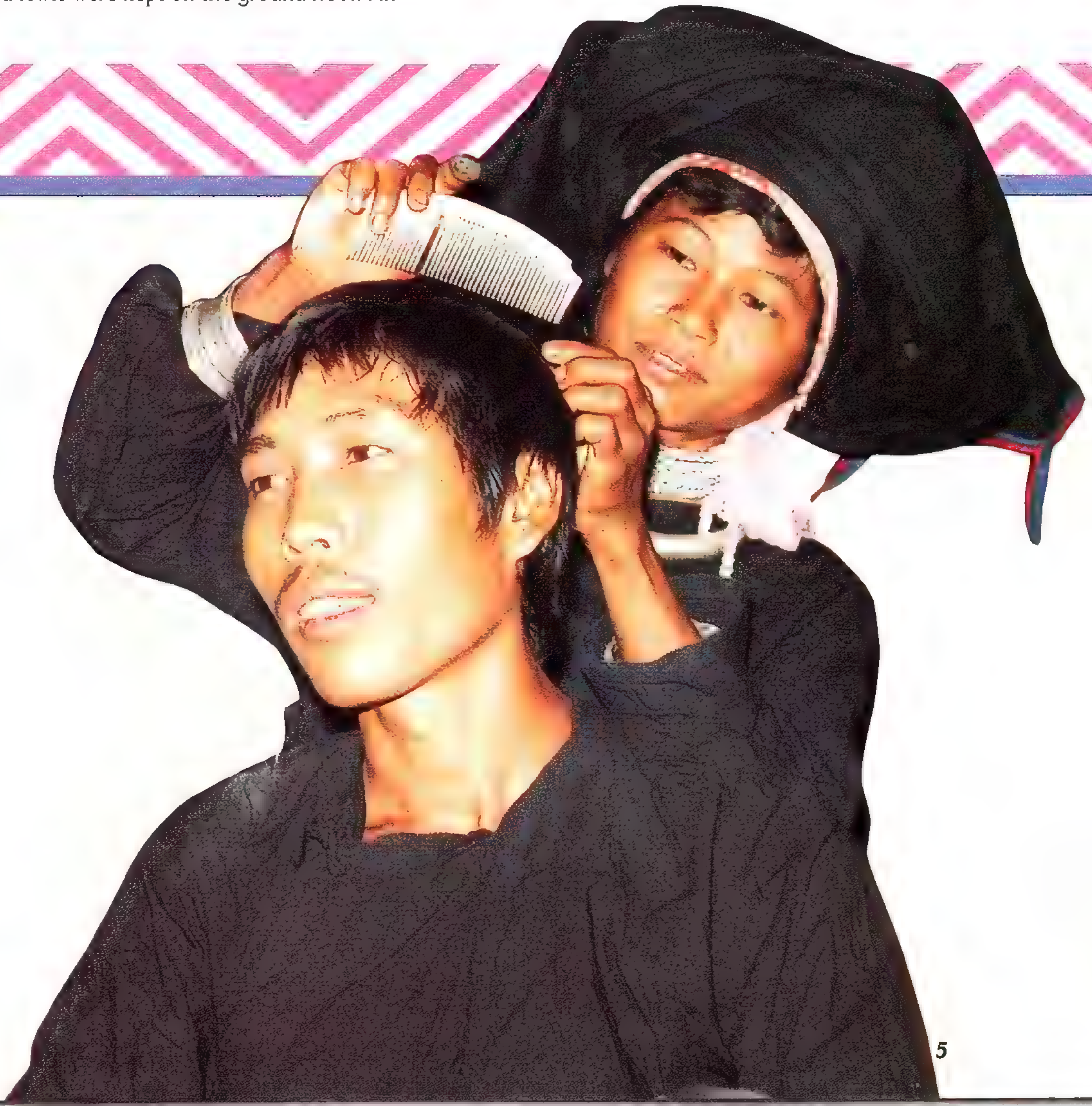
I was particularly interested in the thatched houses, although peeping into them from the outside was all I ventured to do. One villager, finding me standing there spellbound, actually took the initiative of asking me in. To enter the house, one first walks up a few steps on a wooden stair. The canopy over the entrance and the house itself were of woven straw, Va buildings being made of the raw materials to hand. It was a two-storied shed-like structure with people living on the upper floor, while domestic animals and fowls were kept on the ground floor. An old woman smoking a long-stemmed pipe received me most hospitably, offering me a cup of tea so strong and dark it looked like ink. I did not have the heart to refuse and drained it with a gulp. It had a bitter taste, but was rather cool and refreshing.

Young Chicken Congee

After my visit to Banhong I set off for the Nuoliang Stockade. I had been warned beforehand that June is not the best time for touring the Awa Mountains, as the month falls into the rainy season. My trip from Banhong to Nuoliang took more than half a day and it rained all the time. I was soaked to the skin. Because I tried to take a shortcut, I actually took two hours more than I should have, prolonging my discomfort.

The rain turned to drizzle as I approached Nuoliang. In the distance I saw mountain slopes dotted with steeply pitched thatched roofs, the houses appearing now and then through the haze.

Hege's inhabitants enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle (1), and Shuangxiang even has running water (4). The unusual granary at Mangyang (2). The 'combing' courting ritual (5), and silver jewellery as a statement of wealth and popularity (3).



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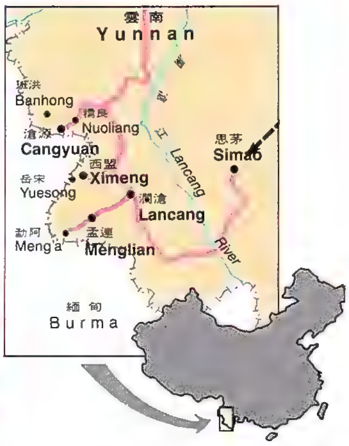
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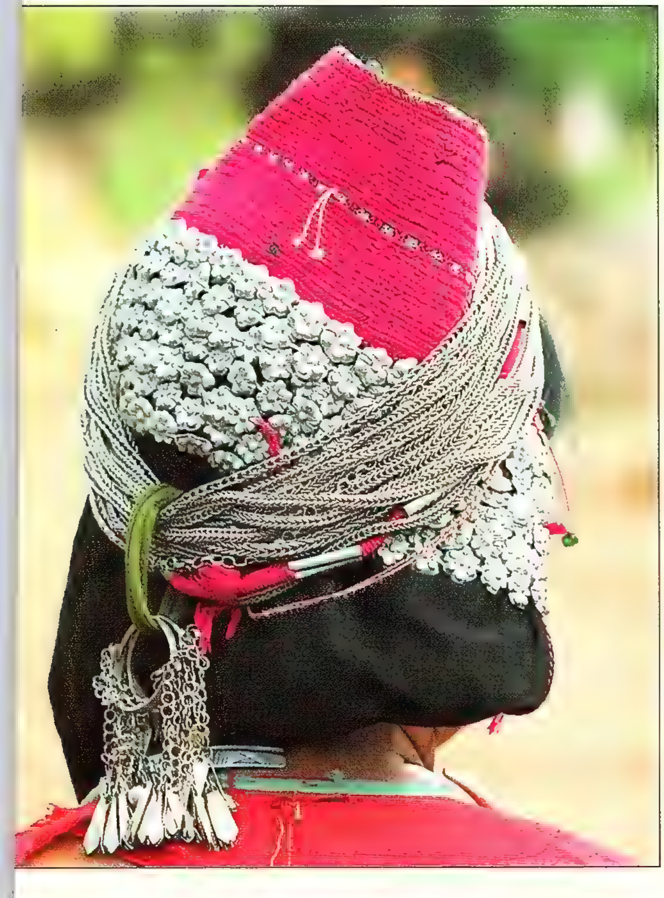

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At Nuoliang I had the good luck of trying young chicken congee, a Va specialty. According to their custom, this dish is prepared on New Year's Day and other festivities, at weddings and sacrificial rites, and to entertain honoured guests. They first stew one or two young chickens in a pot of congee (rice porridge) until the chickens are half-done, and then take them out, mince the meat and mix it with all kinds of seasonings, and finally stir the meat back into the congee. It smells good while cooking and tastes even better!

I stayed at Nuoliang for several days because of the rain, which made it impossible for me to take pictures. Every day I waited hopefully for the weather to clear up while either walking round the only street in the settlement or staying in its reception centre reading books. The people of the stockade finally told me that the weather at Mangyang, some ten kilometres from Nuoliang, might be better because of its lower elevation.

Courting Ritual

Sure enough, the weather was fine when I reached Mangyang Stockade. All was quiet during the daytime, since most of the villagers had gone to work in the fields. Occasionally a few young girls carrying bamboo stems as much as two metres long walked by. Known as 'long dragon' bamboo, with a diameter of about fifteen centimetres, this is used by the Va to store water after being cut into sections and dried in the open air.

I particularly noticed one house built of wooden planks which stood in isolation on the mountain slope; its door fastening was shaped like an ox horn — a unique design. This place was a barn and the grain of every household in Mangyang was stored there. It was deliberately located at some distance from where the people live so that, if and when the thatched cottages caught fire, the stockade's grain reserves would at least be saved.

I was glad to be received by one of the households. After the evening meal, everyone sat outside the front of the house to enjoy the cool breeze. I saw young men in twos and threes walking past talking and laughing, obviously going to meet the girls.

Young men and women of the Va tribe have their own method of courtship. A youth may stop outside the house of his 'dream girl' to play a three-stringed instrument and sing the 'Combing the Hair' serenade:

The standard of life in Hege is demonstrated by the sturdy wooden housing (1) and the elegance and complexity of the women's clothing and accessories (2, 3 and 4).

Hey, girlie, bring along your axe and split the house beam;
Bring along your comb and — comb my hair.

In a flash a girl will pop out to comb his hair! Some bolder girls simply put stools outside their houses and sit on them — to comb the hair of whoever turns up first. After that, the girl and the lad begin to whisper sweet nothings to each other. I was told that the length of time of hair-combing indicates the depth of their affection. He may then give her a gift —a ring, a silver bracelet or a pair of earrings. No girl ever rejects such an offering so as not to hurt the feelings of the donor. And the more gifts she receives, the prouder she will be, for it shows her popularity with the men!

At the foot of a hill not far from Mangyang there are rock paintings one thousand years old, executed, it is said, by the forefathers of the Va people. Cliff paintings of this kind have been discovered in ten locations. Russet in colour, they were drawn with a finger or a feather using animal blood mixed with haematite. Most of them depict people dancing or hunting, while a few are farming scenes.

Jackfruit Crops

I said good-bye to Cangyuan and travelled south to Menglian County. It took me about two hours by bus to travel from the town of Menglian to Meng'a township, where I saw a yellow signboard at the roadside saying 'All Motor Vehicles Stop Here'. We had reached the end of the road. Ahead lay Burmese territory.

The Shuangxiang Stockade I wished to visit was still eight kilometres away. I had to get off the bus and walk, which was indeed not such a bad thing, for it gave me the chance of seeing the sights along the way. Soon I came to the Nanka, the boundary river between China and Burma, at the foot of a hill. I could clearly see Burmese dwellings on the far shore.

As I was feeling tired out after clambering up a hill, there was a loud chugging noise from behind. I turned round to find a mini-tractor going to Shuangxiang to pick up some jackfruit. The driver stopped to give me a lift.

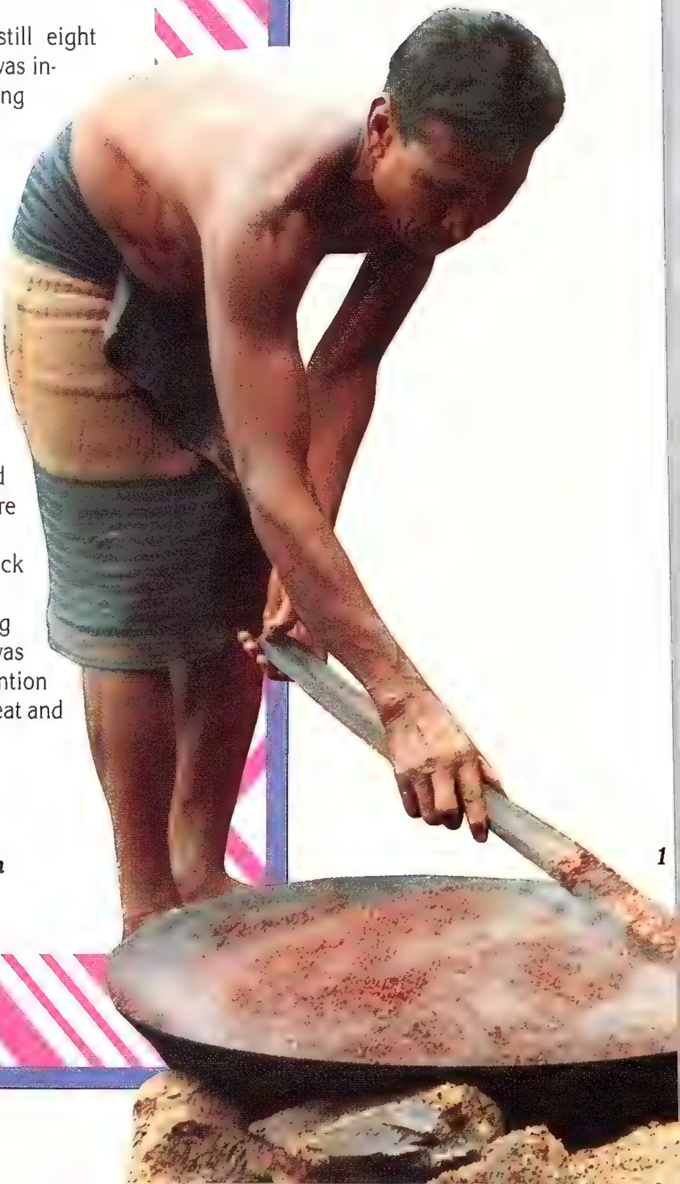
This stockade left a very good impression on me. The houses there were built of woven straw matting on a wooden framework. The place was clean and tidy. Jackfruit grew everywhere in the village and emitted a fragrance that excited my nostrils. And I actually saw water taps and men and women washing themselves under the running water — a rare luxury!

I loitered in the stockade until the mini-tractor came back by me, now loaded. Once again I cadged a lift.

Prior to 1949 the major cash crop in this region bordering the Golden Triangle was opium. When the opium trade was abolished, the people were encouraged to turn their attention elsewhere; several kinds of grain, including winter buckwheat and

(Continued on page 119)

Cooking over an open-air fire pit (1). Unspoiled natural beauty: the giant banyan at Yuesong (2); a young girl from Haidong (3).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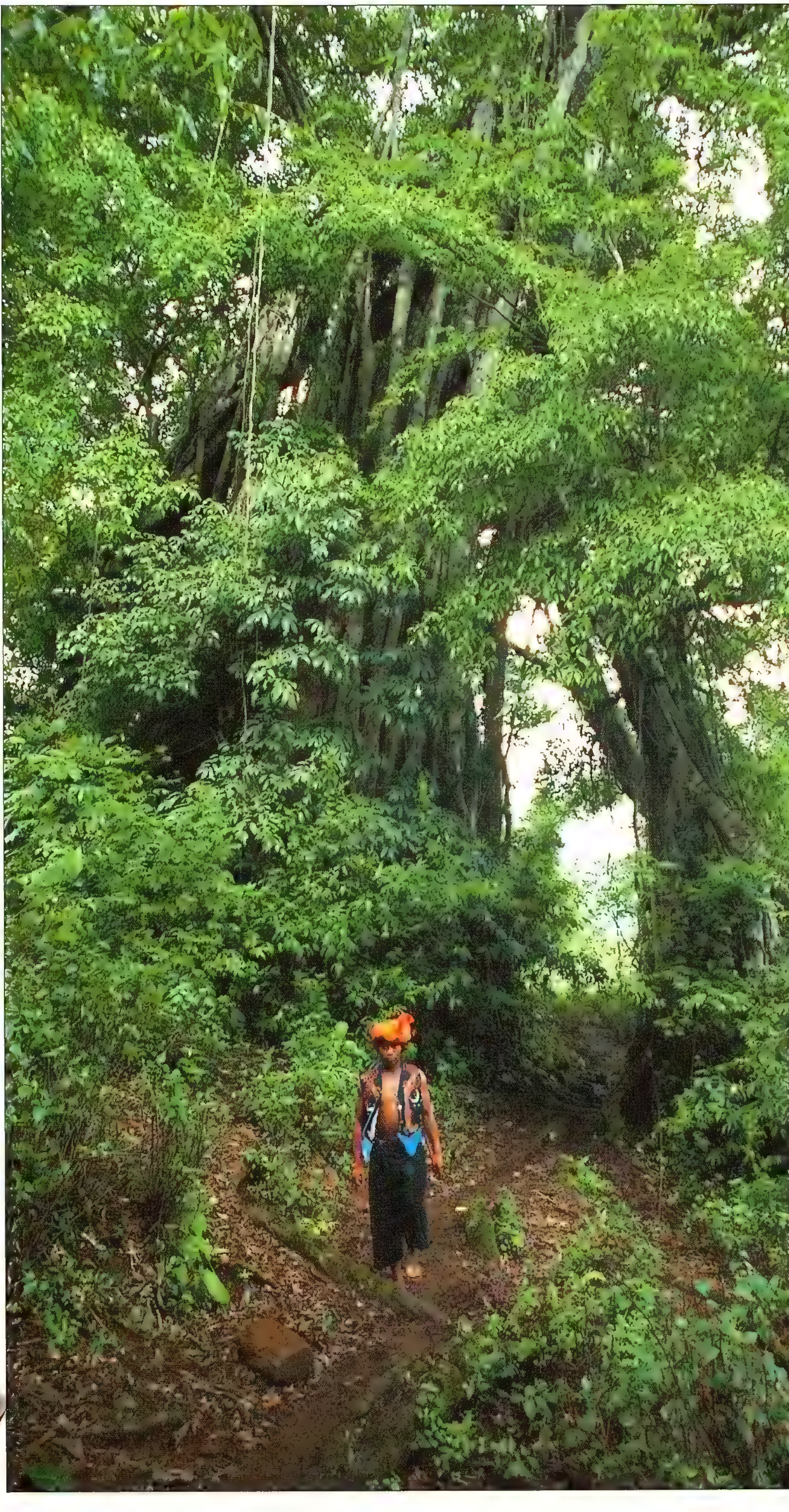

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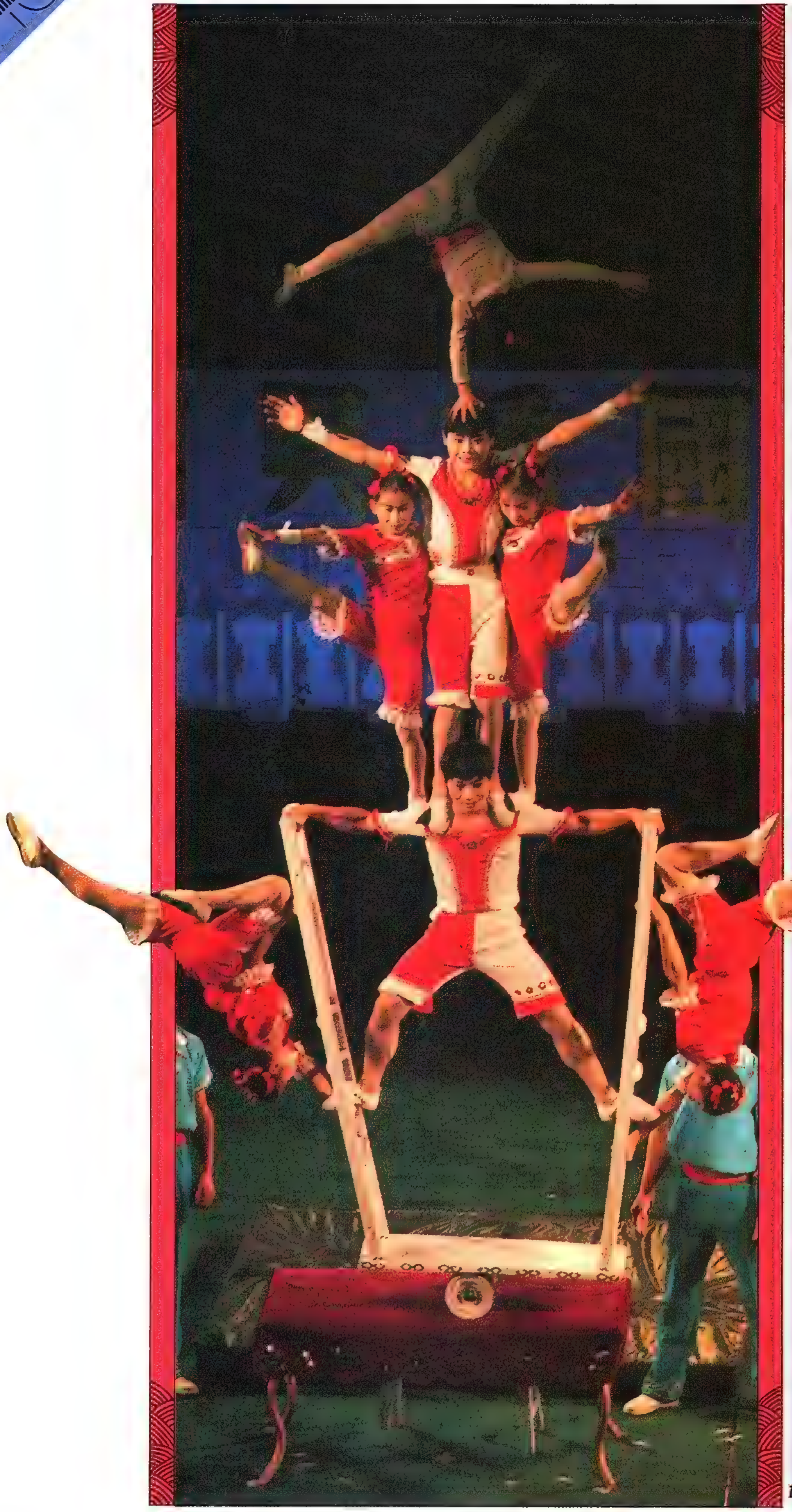

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A Feast of Acrobatic Skills

PHOTOS & ARTICLE
BY CHAPMAN LEE

Dressed in a suit of bright red and just nine years old, he casually turned a few somersaults, then landed neatly on the shoulders of his older brother on the second tier of the human pyramid before performing a single-hand handstand on his brother's head. The older boy at the base of the pyramid was himself only a teenager. Supporting the entire group of six, he was balanced on ladders resting on a free-moving plank!

The applause was thunderous for this group of students from the Wuqiao School of Acrobats. I began to wonder whether, if my father had hung me upside-down when I was barely two, if my mother had tossed me into the air whenever I started to cry, or if I had been born in Wuqiao, the town reputed to be the home of Chinese acrobatics, I too might have developed such remarkable skills.

The Historical Connection

The history of Chinese acrobatics — one of man's first performing arts — dates back at least 2,500 years. Mural paintings discovered in a tomb of the Eastern Wei (534-550) from the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) show people performing the 'Climbing Lizard' and handstands, balancing objects on their bellies and doing trick horse-riding. This tomb is located in the village of Xiaomachang near Wuqiao, further fuelling the hypothesis that this is the 'home of acrobatics' in China.

There is a saying: 'From ninety-nine years of age to toddlers, Wuqiao folk are all good

Participating in the first Wuqiao International Acrobatic Festival: young stars from the Wuqiao School of Acrobatics (1), duo from the Guizhou Acrobatic Troupe (2), the Soviet 'dog-taming' routine (3), and German clowns Walter and Thomas (4).

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acrobats.' Even now Wuqiao can boast a number of active performers, and certainly acrobatic skills seem part and parcel of everyday life there, as we will see.

There is another saying in Chinese acrobatic circles: 'No troupe without Wuqiao folk', underlining the fact that Wuqiao artistes can be found in troupes and circuses all over China. Many of them in the past travelled to foreign places in the course of earning a living, exporting the art of Chinese acrobatics in the process.

International Circus Acts

In the light of the above, it is no surprise that the first Wuqiao International Acrobatic Festival was held not far west of Wuqiao in Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei Province.

The prime attraction for the spectators were the performers from overseas. The USSR, Australia, France, the German Democratic Republic, Korea and Mexico were all represented, and there were also foreign adjudicators in attendance.

French juggler François Chotard twirled a bewildering variety of balls of all sizes; a couple of children from the Wuqiao School of Acrobatics were specially invited to assist him in his performance. The German clowns Walter and Thomas sported vaudeville-type moustaches and performed a slapstick comedy routine. A completely different atmosphere was evoked by a teenager from an Australian circus who performed difficult but graceful manoeuvres high above the ground in a sort of 'rope dance', to the acclamation of the audience.

Soviet circuses are world-famous for their animal acts. This time, S.I. Metelkina put on a 'dog-taming' routine. More than ten snow-white dogs were involved: from fierce barking at the outset they gradually came to perform in unison and to command. One of them seemed extra-excited; it kept running on the turntable even when all the others had already left the stage. Not until the spectators gave it a big hand would it step down!

Chinese Highlights

Also taking part in the festival were sixteen acrobatic troupes from all over China, bringing together many top performers. Although less sophisticated than their foreign counterparts as regards props and costumes,

The Hebei lion dancers (1) were crowd-pleasers, along with the Australian rope dancer (2) and the French juggler (4). Souvenir medals were awarded to participants (3).

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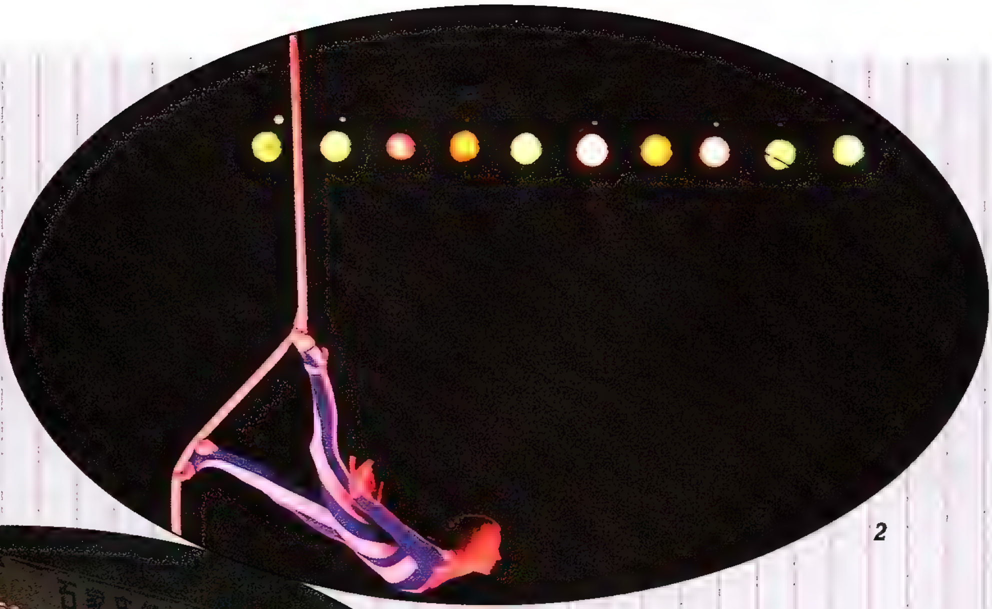

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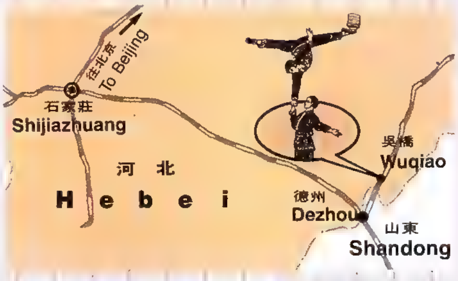
往北京
To Beijing
石家莊
Shijiazhuang
河 北
Hebei
吳橋
Wuqiao
德州
Dezhou
山東
Shandong

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he Chinese artistes nevertheless offered two venings of the most wonderful skills.

The Hebei Acrobatic Troupe performed an tem called 'Balancing on a Rope'. At first the erformance seemed to be of only moderate nterest: three girls holding poles walked uphill on a sloping tightrope. Then suddenly, the girl in the lead stopped in mid-rope, took a deep breath, and somersaulted backwards to erform the splits in such a way that her legs ame to rest precisely on the shoulder of the girl in front and behind. She took the audience totally by surprise; some only started to applaud after a gap of several seconds. They were even more astonished when they had had time to realize that the tightrope was stretched some ten metres above the ground without benefit of safety devices!

Another item performed by this troupe was a lion dance. Each consisting of two people, the four northern-style lions danced grandly, rolling and tumbling. This was a very familiar scene for local spectators — nothing special. But then, towards the end of the programme, the lions vanished behind a curtain which then rose to display a 'lion pyramid'. The two lions at the base of the pyramid were perched on a big ball so that in all eight performers were balanced in two tiers. The spectators were still applauding when the ball started to roll under the lions' feet — up a seesaw and down the other side. Meanwhile, the two lions at the top were winking to the spectators as if to say 'What fun!'

An artiste from Jilin Province's Changchun Acrobatic Troupe also performed on a giant ball as though it were level ground. She

Traditional skills: detail of a sixth-century tomb mural (1), and wall decoration seen in a present-day Wuqiao household (2). Just another day in the fields for a local family (3)!

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mounted the ball by riding her monocycle up a metal ramp. Once there, she used one foot to kick a few bowls on to her head, without using her hands at all, then a teapot, and finally the lid, which landed in its appropriate place on the teapot.

A juggler from the China Acrobatic Troupe, her legs even more dexterous than her hands, performed a number entitled 'Double Flying Umbrellas'. Not only did she use all four limbs to toss and twist five umbrellas, but she was able to perform two completely different movements with her legs: with her right leg she turned an umbrella clockwise on one plane while, with the left, she juggled another umbrella in another direction, on another plane, at a different speed. The spectators were quite dazzled by the sight, but the performer kept her cool throughout.

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Some of the items had more of an ethnic touch. One of these was the lantern-rolling performed by the troupe from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. 'Sabayi' was an ingenious combination of tambourine-playing with dance and acrobatics performed by the Xinjiang Acrobatic Troupe, which gave full play to the Uygur nationality's love of singing and dancing.

Origins in Wrestling

After the end of the festival, as Wuqiao was quite close, I went there with some of the acrobats and other reporters to compare the polished stage performances we had just seen with acrobatics as part of the rural lifestyle of the district. It took us about five hours by car, Wuqiao being on the border with Shandong Province. (This would actually make an interesting tour circuit: one could go from

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Shijiazhuang to Wuqiao, then north to Cangzhou, famous for its martial arts, then on to Tianjin and Beijing.)

The origin of acrobatics is mentioned in the *Records of the Historian,* the first comprehensive history of China, compiled as a series of biographies by Sima Qian between 104 and 91 B.C. in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220). In Chinese mythology, it is said that 5,000 years ago a bloody battle erupted on the North China Plain between two tribal leaders, Chiyou and Huangdi. Chiyou resisted hard and the hand-to-hand fighting which ensued became a trial of military strength used in training. It was first known as 'Chiyou's game'. In the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.) this became known as *jiaodixi* (wrestling). It gradually evolved into a competitive spectator sport, and is said to have formed the basis for gymnastics and acrobatics.

Over many centuries, acrobatics even gained entry to the imperial court. For example, we know that in the first month of every lunar year, as part of the New Year festivities, Emperor Yangdi of the Sui dynasty (581-618) and Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty held a 'show of a hundred performances' (a sort of variety show which included acrobatics, martial arts, lantern juggling, comic acts, music, singing and dancing, but with the emphasis on acrobatics) to entertain foreign envoys.

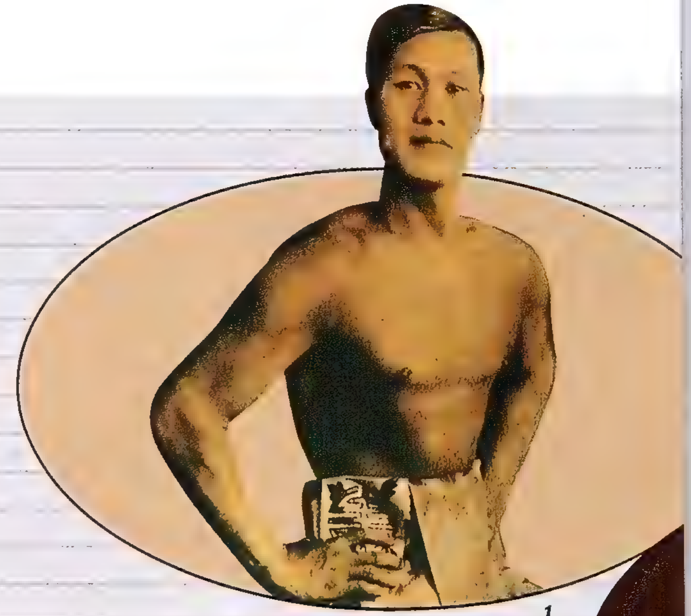
When we finally reached Wuqiao, the town on the Grand Canal seemed nothing out of the ordinary. It took us a while to discover its special features. One of the pointers was that the household decorations of the average town-dweller all seemed to be related to acrobatics: faded photographs of acrobat ancestors or calendars and paintings depicting gymnasts and acrobats held pride of place.

But outside the town the signs were more conclusive. In the fields you frequently see a farmer walking along juggling a hoe, a woman juggling with corncobs to keep her grandchildren amused, old men balancing watermelons on their heads....

Beneath the Glamour

Local people hope their children will enter the Wuqiao School of Acrobatics and become famous performers of the future. I learned that this school only accepts local children

Scenes from everyday Wuqiao life: juggling corncobs (1, by Hua Fangying), practising the splits (2), balancing tricks (3, by Huang Hui); pressed into reluctant service as a prop (4).



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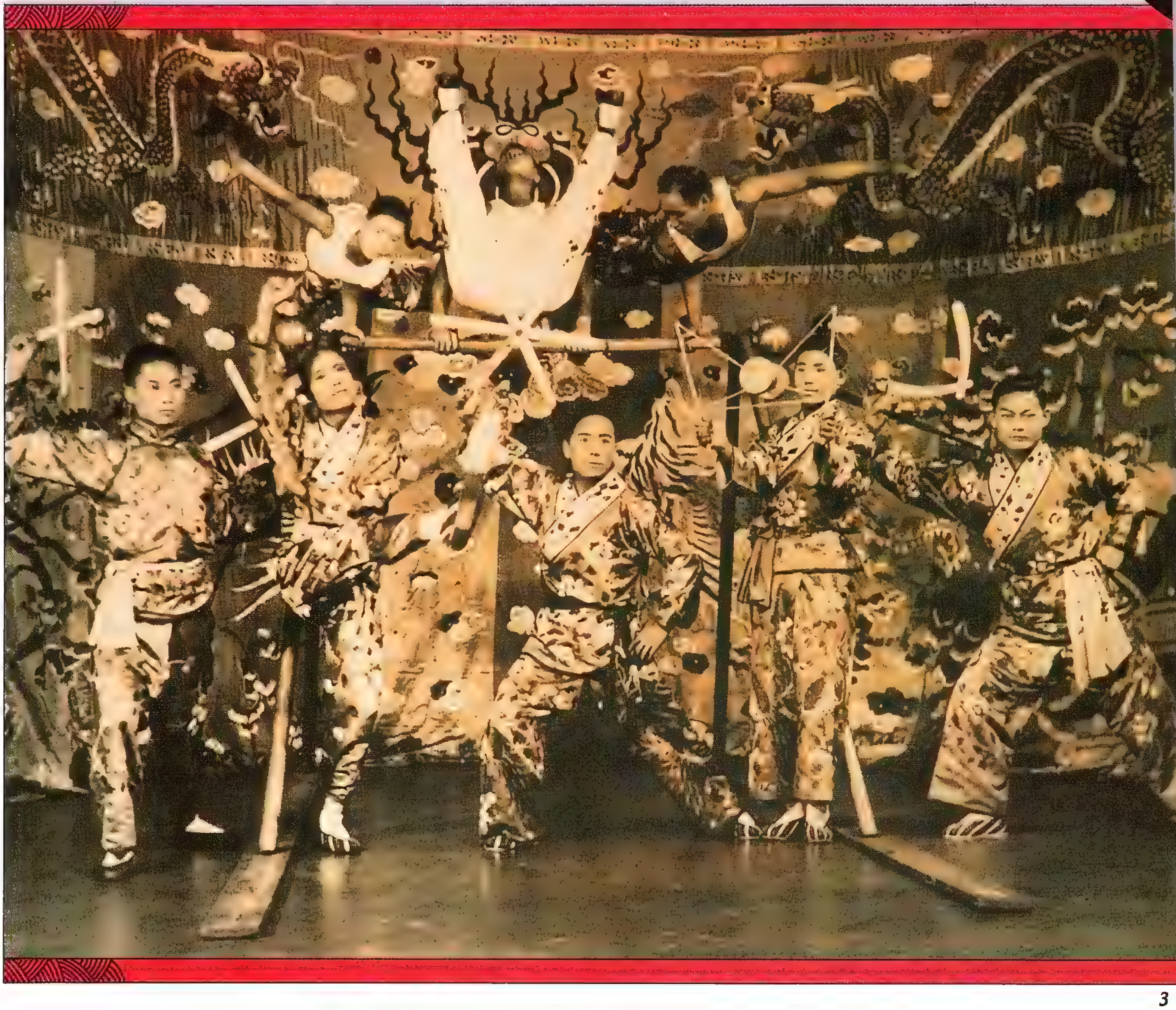

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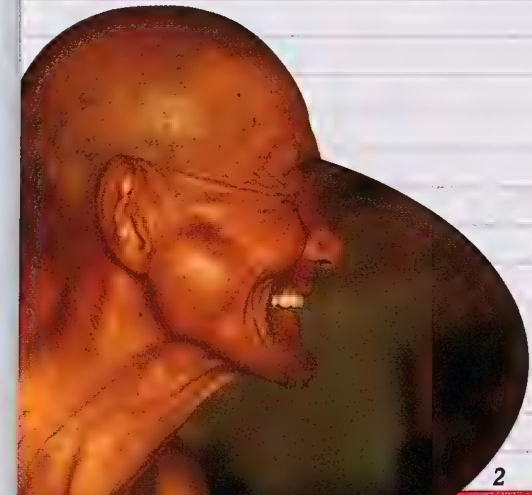
aged between seven and fourteen. The intake is limited to about thirty new students every three or four years, but there are often over five hundred applicants.

The school's facilities are in fact not very good and students lead a hard life as boarders: all the boys sleep on one big *kang* (heatable brick bed), all the girls on another, and they are provided with three simple meals a day. Only two hours a day are devoted to ordinary lessons; the rest of the time is spent on physical training and practising acrobatic movements and sequences.

Performing tricks on stage might look easy, but this ease is only achieved with a lot of hard work. I saw a girl practising balancing, her nose rubbed raw by her efforts. Another young tightrope-walker fell off and hurt her arm, but after shedding a few tears she went straight back to continue. Maybe it is because of the strict discipline that these children seem too old for their age. Acrobatics is something that requires a lifetime of dedication — fortunate indeed for these youngsters that people are now beginning to give it its rightful due and consider it a form of performing arts. Nowadays, the staff and students need more than application. They need to think of upgrading their equipment, of balanced nutrition, and the acquisition of skills in other disciplines such as dance and theatre.

From an interview with the 88-year-old master Shi Dejun I learned more about the vicissitudes of a professional acrobat's life. Shi was sold to a theatrical troupe at the tender age of eight, then to a German circus when he was twelve. The greater part of his life was spent in foreign lands, travelling through over twenty countries in Europe and America. He speaks Russian, German, English, French and Italian in addition to his native Chinese. In fact, he first conversed with me in English when we met. From an ancient leather suitcase Shi produced some of his photographs of those times: one showed the 'Royal Pekin Troupe' that he led to Europe and America in 1925, another featured his wife of French-Chinese origin and his son, now living in distant lands. Others portrayed Shi in the flower of his youth. Every photo bore testimony to the restless, rootless, exciting life of a Wuqiao acrobat of the old days in search of a livelihood.

Translated by Annette Lee



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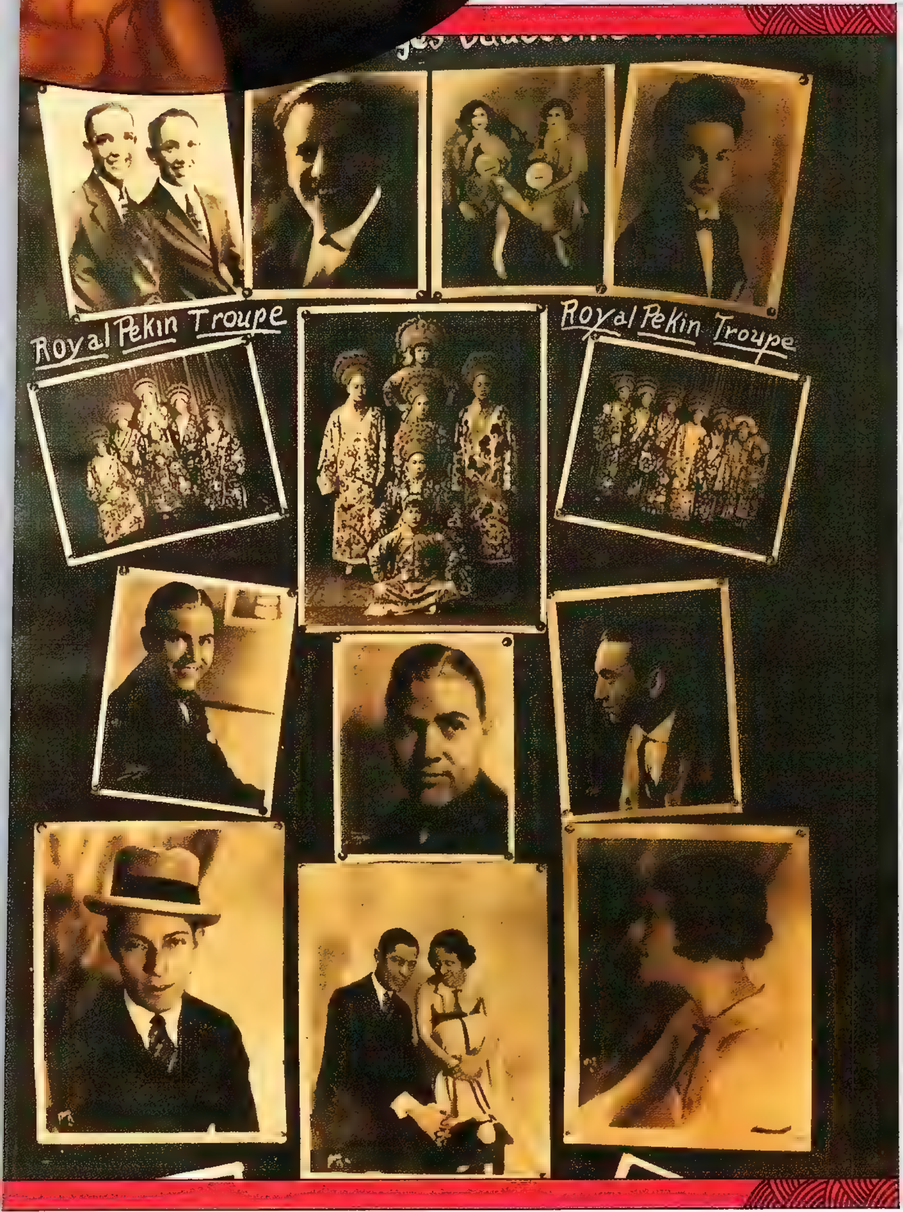

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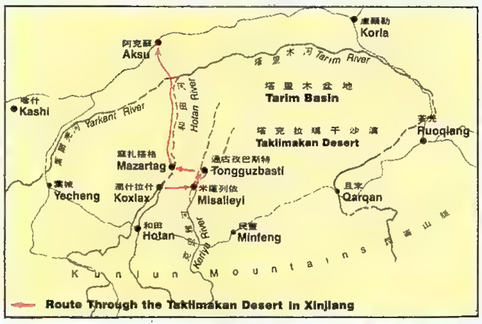
Now eighty-eight, Master Shi Dejun (2) looks back over his life as an acrobat, from teenager (1) to leader of his own troupe (3, by Yu Zhixin, and 4).

Through the Sea of Death

ARTICLE BY LIANG FENG


阿克苏
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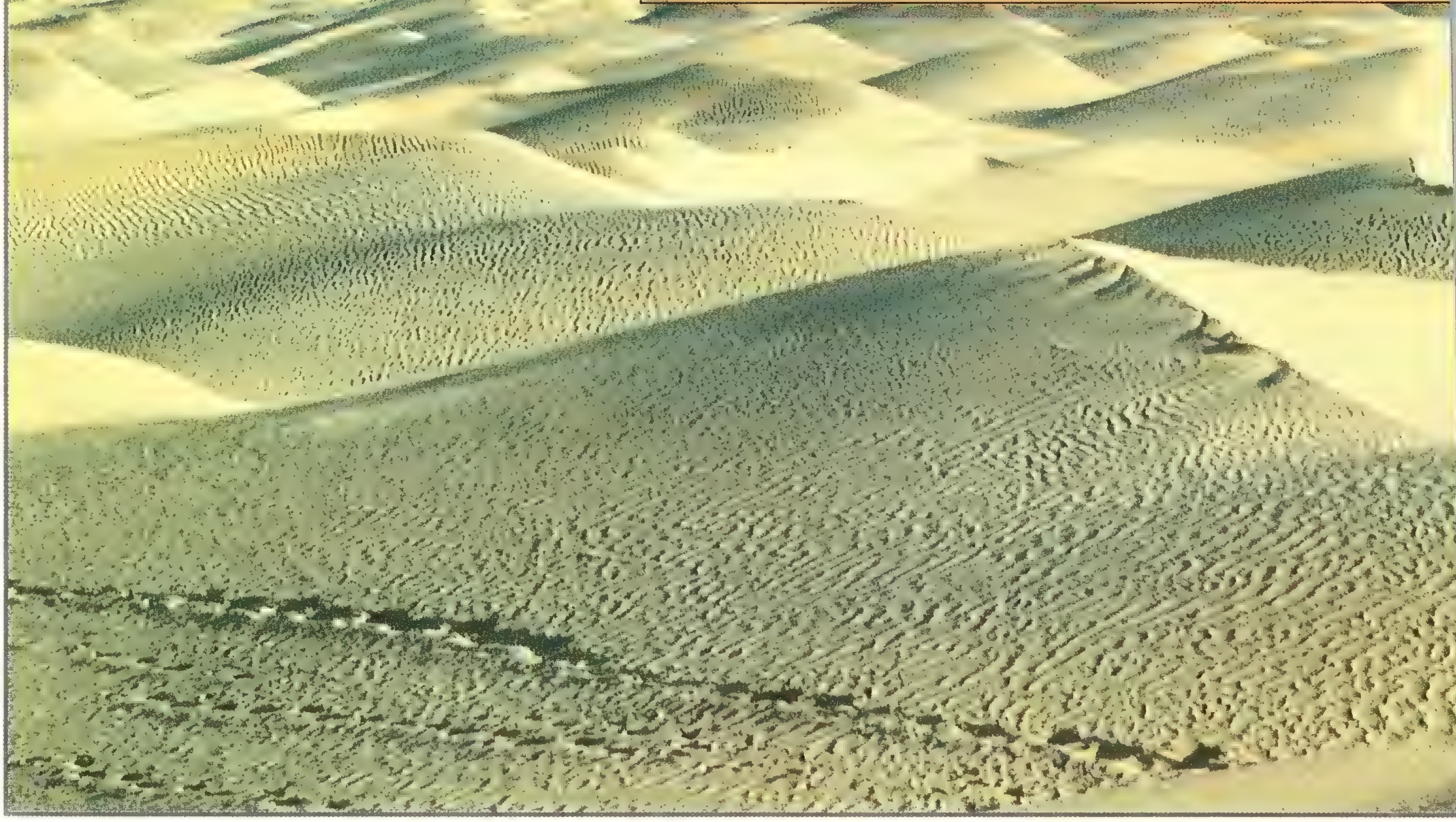
Tarim Basin
喀什
Kashi
叶尔羌河 Yarkant River
和田河 Hotan River
塔克拉玛干沙漠
Taklimakan Desert
若羌
Ruoqiang
麻扎塔格
Mazartag
通古孜巴斯特
Tongguzbasti
叶城
Yecheng
阔什拉什
Koxlax
米萨列依
Misalleyi
且末
Qarqan
和田
Hotan
克里雅河 Keriya River
民丰
Minfeng
Kunlun Mountains
Route Through the Taklimakan Desert in Xinjiang



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The centre of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang in northwestern China is occupied by the 337,000 square kilometres of the Taklimakan Desert. The name of this desert, the second biggest shifting desert in the world and the biggest in China, underlines its fearsome reputation as it means 'no way out once in' in the tongue of the Uygurs. Its climate — extremely arid, with an annual precipitation of generally below fifty millimetres — and the deadly force of the sandstorms it generates have claimed many lives over the centuries. The trading caravans of the Silk Road used to skirt it, following the line of the oases to north and south. Over time the desert has spread south and rivers have changed their courses, so that many once prosperous cities and towns have been swallowed up in its relentless advance. However, the tales woven around its horrors and its mysteries have served only to add to its attraction for hardened adventurers and explorers. One of these was the famous Swede Sven Hedin, who only just managed to survive his first crossing of the Taklimakan in 1895 by the skin of his teeth.

Following a very similar route, on 4 October 1987 the French Taklimakan Desert Expedition, led by the French writer Jacques Lanzmann, set off east from Koxlax on the River Hotan in the southwestern part of the desert, with supplies loaded on ten camels. Our team was composed of four Frenchmen and six Chinese, including the three camel handlers. We planned to pass through the heart of the desert, a stretch of one hundred kilometres between the rivers Hotan and Keriya, completing this first leg in five days. Then we intended to head due north out of the desert to Aksu, our destination. The whole trip would cover a distance of over six hundred kilometres.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

When we bade farewell to our helpers in Koxlax, they seemed keyed up but joked, 'Hope you make it! Come out alive!'

That first afternoon it was hot, but we made fairly rapid progress. After three hours, however, a Chinese member of the party felt unwell and fainted. It would have been silly for him to go on, so we camped while one of the camel handlers took him back to base camp and brought out another person to replace him.

From the strip vegetation near the river (1), the team heads out into the true desert wastes (4); the monotony of the crossing is broken by the occasional thicket of poplars and tamarisks (3) (3 and 4 by Shen Changyong) and by meetings with the back-up team (2) (1 and 2 by Liang Feng).

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The River Hotan rises in and is fed by the glaciers and snows of the mighty Kunlun Mountains which fringe the southern limit of the desert. The river forms a kind of 'strip' oasis, so that it is bordered on either side by dense woods of diversiform-leaved poplars and tamarisks. It was only after marching for four or five kilometres that we left this belt of living things and entered the desert proper, where we were faced with dunes of all shapes and sizes. It was very difficult to walk in the shifting sand, and almost impossible to surmount dunes over a hundred metres high because we kept slipping back. We were forced to make a detour to avoid these, so we often sent a man to climb a dune two or three kilometres ahead as a sort of human surveyor's pole to fix our line of march.

We walked seven or eight hours a day, guided by the compass. As the dunes looked alike and there were no landmarks to check against the map, we could only calculate our progress roughly once we had camped at the end of the day.

To avoid getting lost in the 'sea of death' we had brought along a radio and often contacted our base camp, Aksu and even Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang. We thus had the security of knowing that we would not be completely helpless even if we did get into a tight spot.

Mid-Autumn Festival in the Desert

The temperatures in the desert varied so greatly that, although we wore sweaters in the morning, we stripped off as we marched, and by noon we were dripping with sweat even in shorts and vests. It proved cooler to keep walking than to rest in a place where there was no shade.

Sunrise and sunset were enchanting, with the coloured clouds on the horizon shining upon the desert and producing ever-changing tableaux. On the evening of the Mid-Autumn Festival it was fine, and the great round moon loomed so close that we felt we could almost touch it. We Chinese members of the party could not help missing our families on this occasion, but there was nothing to do but write about our feelings in our diaries.

As night deepened, we sat around the bonfire. I offered my moon-cakes — traditional pastries stuffed with a delicious filling — to bring our French friends into the spirit of the festival. We wished each other well and retreated to our tents in the small hours of the morning.

The sand, heated by the scorching sun in the daytime, cooled so rapidly that at night the temperature dropped to zero. Lying in the tent, I listened to the whispering of the wind and the hiss of the moving sand, intensifying the eerie stillness of the desert. My companions began to snore one after another, and gradually I too dropped off.

Attempt at Well-Digging

The four Frenchmen had crossed the Sahara more than once and were very experienced in desert lore such as setting up a stove and cooking out of the wind. We savoured even simple meals like instant noodles. They taught us how to clean our bowls and spoons with sand after meals, a very practical method as it is hygienic and saves water.

However, there were still times when eating was difficult. Late one day, unable to walk any further, we set up camp, but a howling wind whipped the sand ceaselessly, and we could neither light a fire nor wait for ever, so we ate hardtack. As soon as I opened my mouth, I got a mouthful of sand. We eventually ate with our jackets over our heads.

As we went on, the two major drawbacks were the intense heat, which made us stream with sweat, and the need for water-rationing: we could not quench our thirst properly. One morning we decided to sacrifice a day's progress to stay in camp and dig a well. We took turns to dig. At a depth of two metres water appeared. We went wild with joy, and everyone wanted to drink first. Alas, the water was undrinkably bitter and brackish! We sank to the ground, very disappointed. Later we met a professional well-digger who knew how to choose a site where the water was potable.

A Shroud of Yellow

We continued our journey, dune by dune. Apart from sand, all we saw were the dry branches of poplars twisted by the wind into all kinds of strange postures — sometimes looking like ugly devils with bared fangs and brandished claws — creating an aura of fear and mystery in the still desert.

By the seventh day we had covered a hundred kilometres, but ahead there was still no sign of the River Keriya. The

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The Mid-Autumn Festival moon looms bold and beautiful (1), while the pale gleam of dawn lights early-morning preparations (5). Although warm clothing is needed much of the time (3) (1, 3 and 5 by Shen Changyong), midday necessitates an inspection for sunburn (2). Radio contact is maintained with the outside world (4) (2 and 4 by Liang Feng).

weather changed again: sand lifted by the wind covered the sky, which merged with the ground. A haze of sand prevented us seeing each other even close to, and the footprints of the person in front were very soon obliterated. It would have been all too easy to get lost. The sandstorm and the lack of water made us nervous. One of the camel drivers sang:

Why are you so big, Taklimakan?
Is it true that we cannot get out?
Where are you, Keriya,
That we cannot come to you?

His tremulous voice floated desolately on the wind.

But even at this crucial point we did not lose confidence in each other. Sixty-two-year-old Lanzmann, wearing a sand-proof hood, and the others, swaddled like Tuaregs, marched into the wind with heads lowered. Suddenly Michel, another team member, cried out. In the direction in which he was pointing we spotted a black line, now appearing, now disappearing, through the hazy sea of sand. 'Keriya!' we shouted exultantly and quickened our steps. A few dunes later, we realized that it was not the river at all but a stand of dead poplars.

Living in the Desert's Heart

On the eighth day we saw a riverbed and large numbers of dead trees, among which were scattered some living poplars and tamarisks. Green life at last! The Keriya would be in sight soon, we thought. Sure enough, at four o'clock on the afternoon of the tenth day, a long stretch of poplars emerged in front of us. Standing on top of a dune we cried out with delight and tears of relief welled up.

We had spent ten days on a stretch of the journey to which we had allotted only five, but more unexpected still was the vista of luxuriant poplar woods dotted with red tamarisks in the midst of the desert. We walked through them for two hours until we came to Misalieyi on the River Keriya.

Without resting we crossed the river and continued to Daheyan, a fifty-kilometre hike. Among the yellowed poplars along the banks were scattered beds of silvery reeds swaying in the wind. Although it was the dry season, there were still clear pools in the riverbed. Past the dunes we saw a strange kind of plant shaped like a lollipop, as well as lizards and snails.

Every ten or twenty kilometres we saw a shepherd family whose mode of life was fairly primitive: their dwellings were built of branches of tamarisk and poplar. The men wore sheepskin leggings and footwear, the married women white veils and small black caps known as *tailebaike*. All had straight noses, deep-set eyes and swarthy faces. They carried axes instead of whips when tending their flocks, presumably because the sheep would not stray but it was often necessary to hack a way through brambles and thorns. Living in the desert, they were very tough, but hospitable towards outsiders like ourselves.

Beyond Mazartag

After a two-day rest in Daheyan, loaded with supplies sent up from our base camp, we turned back west across the desert to Mazartag on the River Hotan, still 340 kilometres from Aksu. This time the crossing only took seven days.

Following the dry bed of the Hotan out of town, we came upon an ancient fort, apparently built in the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220). As we stood on the hill (Mazartag in Uygur means 'tomb hill'), the sun rose beyond sand-strewn, foggy hillocks, casting its golden rays on the poplars and tamarisks along the river bed which wound dry into the desert, a picturesque setting indeed for this centuries-old citadel.

Our group walked northward, and again all we saw for three days were dunes and poplars, so that we tired even of these beautiful trees. Our ennui was relieved by the timely discovery of a shepherd's cottage, where we were invited to spend the night. We slept soundly under cover after many days of 'eating in the wild and sleeping in the dew'.

We pushed on towards Aksu. This part of the trip was blessedly smooth and uneventful. One morning of drizzle and piercingly cold wind we arrived on the banks of the River Tarim on the northern rim of the Taklimakan and crossed over, reaching Aksu, the termination of our desert expedition, that evening.

We had been gone thirty-eight days, much longer than we had expected, but ... we had gone into the Taklimakan and survived to tell the tale. We had swum safely through the 'sea of death'!

Translated by Wu Ling

Lanzmann demonstrates desert 'washing-up' techniques (1); the professional well-digger (2). The team takes the opportunity to buy grapes on the desert fringe (4) and meets a Uygur family near the Hotan (3) (3 and 4 by Liang Feng). A resourceful Uygur herdsman with his flock (5) (1, 2 and 5 by Shen Changyong).

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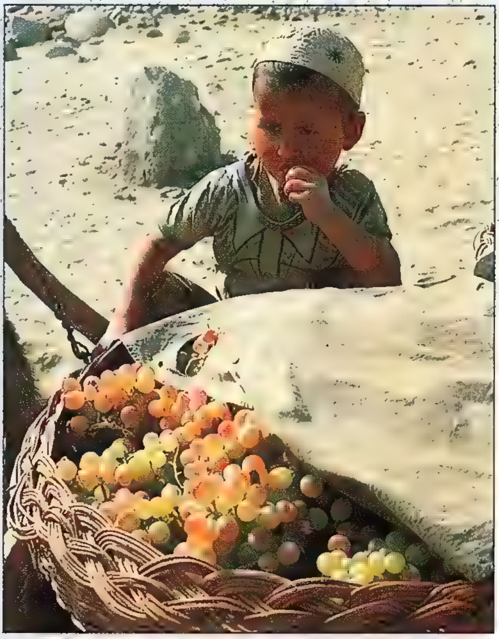

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Assault on Xixabangma

PHOTOS & ARTICLE
BY CHUNG KIN MAN

In the middle of August last year, no sooner had I returned to Hong Kong after attending an international mountaineering conference in the USSR than I received another invitation. This time the destination was Mount Xixabangma (Gosainthan) in Tibet, and the organizer was Operation Raleigh, a UK-based international exchange scheme for young people of the Outward Bound type. I was exhausted, but the urge to conquer an 8,000-metre mountain proved irresistible. This had been my dream for the past ten years of my mountaineering career and I would not have let any opportunity of making it come true pass me by.

Rising to 8,012 metres (26,290 feet), this mountain in the Himalayas is one of China's highest. It is classed fourteenth among the world's highest mountains — there are in fact only fourteen above 8,000 metres. Xixabangma (or Shisha Pangma) is the Tibetan name for the mountain and means 'crest above the grassy plain'. Gosainthan is its name in Sanskrit — 'abode of the gods' — and, like all major peaks in Nepal and Tibet, it is indeed considered holy by the local people. It was the last of the 8,000-metre giants to fall, being conquered by a 195-man Chinese expedition only in 1964, and has been open to foreign climbers officially since 1979.

Final Preparations

So, one September morning, there I was with my heavy backpack in Kathmandu, capital of Nepal. I spent the night there and next morning took a bus to the Chinese-Nepali border. Having completed the formalities, I crossed the Friendship Bridge and stepped on to Chinese territory at the Tibetan border town of Zhangmu. This was the Jade Venture Expedition's rendezvous point: a stream of porters arrived with our supplies. From here we team members travelled some thirty-five kilometres to Nyalam, a small town perched at 3,800 metres above sea-level.

The expedition, consisting of over thirty men and women, was divided into two sub-groups. The first was the climbers; these were all British and their purpose in climbing Xixabangma was to 'warm up' before their attempt on Mount Qomolangma (Everest). The second group was made up of British, American and Chinese scientists whose major aim was to carry out research on glacier movements and atmospheric pollution.

Nyalam became our general back-up and supplies base. The town lies on a piece of flat land with a river winding alongside; the scenery is magnificent. We spent three days there, making final checks to our equipment and preparing ourselves for the mountain by resting and eating plenty of good food to enable us to face the storms and hard conditions — the world of snow, ice and rock — that we knew lay ahead.

Five Hours' Hard Grind

But finally we were ready and, a 25-kilo pack on my back, I left

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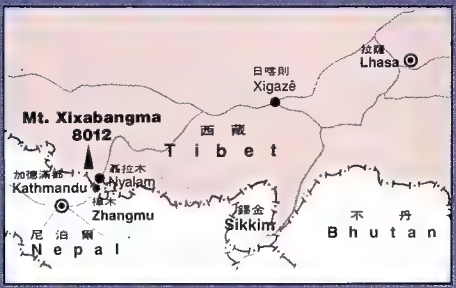
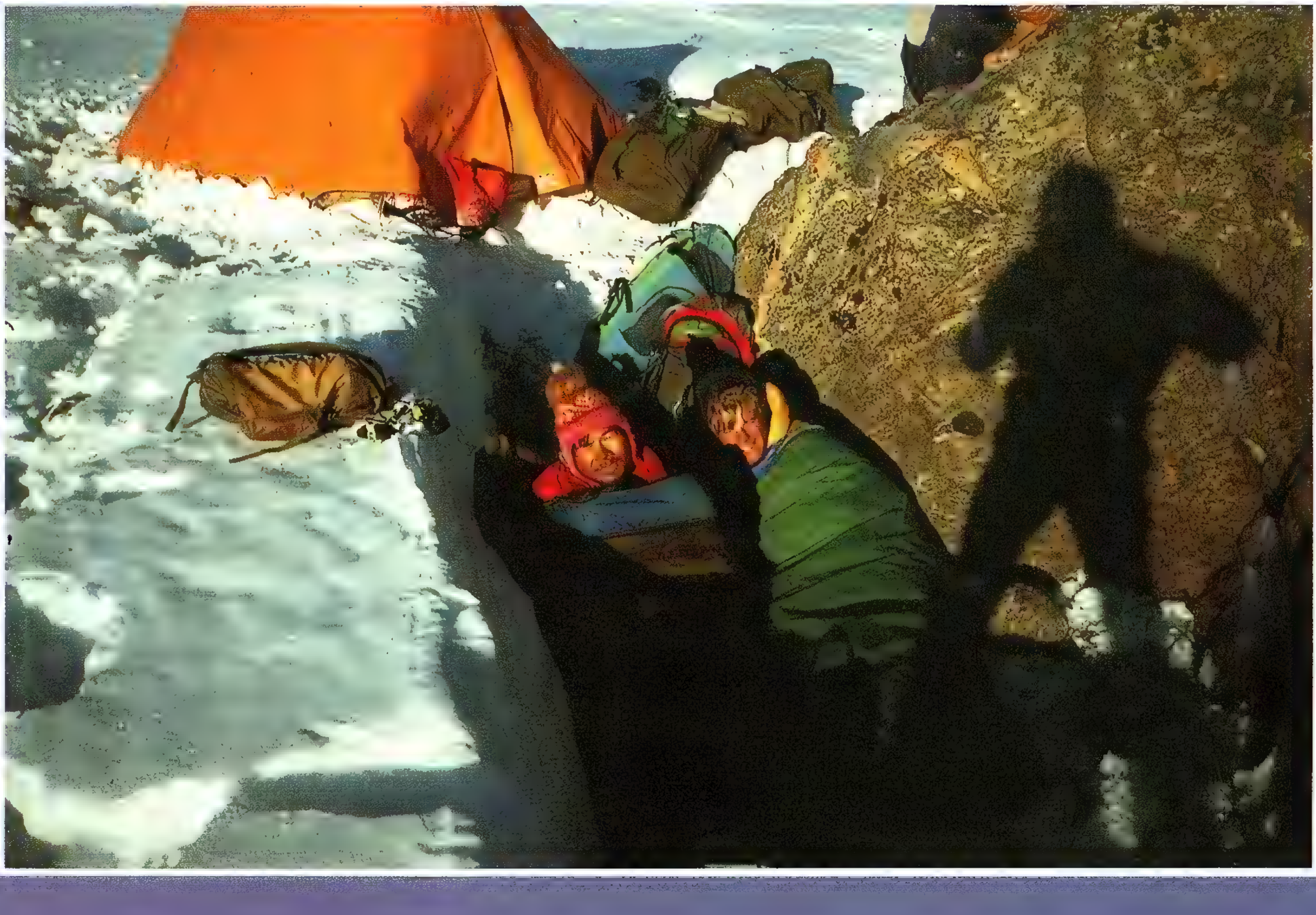


A critical moment crossing the glacier (1) at altitudes where constant care is necessary to protect against snow glare and UV rays (2). The train of porters approaches the Friendship Bridge (3).



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the Nyalam camp together with my team-mates and a string of yaks bearing our heavy stores. We walked west for three days (a distance of twenty-five kilometres) to reach the Xixabangma base camp at 5,000 metres.

The first thing we had to do after setting up our tents was melt ice and boil it for drinking water, a job which sounds simple in the extreme but, at this altitude, is anything but! It's true that there is plenty of snow and ice around at 5,000 metres, but one pound of ice only produces around one-tenth of its volume in water. A lot of time and energy is needed to obtain just one litre of water, and the number of small gas bottles consumed is astonishing.

The next stage — from base camp to advance base camp, an increase in altitude of just one hundred metres — proved almost the toughest task of the entire trip. It took us five whole hours. We had to make detours around several ice lakes, teeter laboriously up and down over terrain perilous with crumbling mud and boulders ... all in all a most difficult and dangerous experience which it is difficult to explain adequately to those who have not shared it. In addition, I had to push myself constantly not to fall behind my companion, who was British and almost seven feet tall. His big strides meant I had to take three for every two of his.

Sharing a tent with this giant also proved tough. Since the tent was not long enough for him to stretch his legs out properly with the entrance closed, we had to leave the flap ajar. Result: an icy draft that kept us both awake half the night!

Leap Across the Void

While we were at the advance base camp, we were surprised by a severe snowstorm which pinned us down for two days and nights. The wind just started to howl and, within seconds, the sky and the snowfields had merged into a single expanse of greyish-white. It was impossible to see anything.

When the storm finally abated, we grabbed our loads and started to inch towards the first camp, located at 5,700 metres. On the way we had to tackle ice cliffs, traverse glaciers and cope with the greatest problem of all — the lack of oxygen.

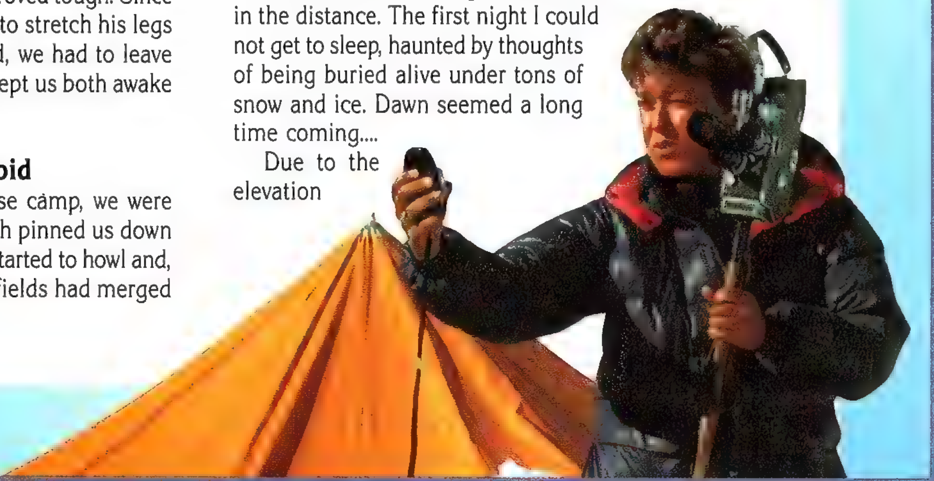
Faced with an icefall eight storeys high, we had to sink our ice axe and hammer deep in the vertical fall, then rely on our arms to pull us upwards. We performed the necessary actions mechanically, like robots, for over an hour before we reached the top.

The most dangerous times were when we had to negotiate crevasses on the glacier. When we came to one three metres across, the expedition photographers came up with the bright idea of taking a shot of somebody in the act of jumping it. It had never occurred to me that I might be given the 'starring role'! I had a safety harness on and was roped up, of course, but I confess I prayed hard all the same. I measured the distance carefully with my eyes, then backed up a little before running and launching myself across the gap with all my might.

Dehydrated Food

At night, as we lay on the uneven, frozen ground, we often heard the rumbling of avalanches in the distance. The first night I could not get to sleep, haunted by thoughts of being buried alive under tons of snow and ice. Dawn seemed a long time coming....

Due to the elevation



3

4

The frozen world near the base camp (1). Still higher, the reward for gallantry (leaving the tent for the ladies) was a night in a snow hole — no joke at -20°C (2). Lighting is tricky under mountain conditions (3). On the way back, a dip in a hot spring in Xigazê washes away the aches and tensions of the trip (4).

Expedition climbers view the task ahead (1); yaks transport the heaviest loads (2). Scaling an icefall (3) and digging out a cave to shelter from the biting wind (4).

JADE
VENTURE

3

and the rarefied air it was impossible to cook rice at the first camp. Instead we ate dehydrated food — you just remove the plastic outer cover, pour in hot water, and dinner is ready in five minutes. Although unexciting, such a meal is definitely better than nothing.

The conditions at the camp were spartan, but after all we had expected them. Mountaineering is a sport which emphasizes and indeed relies on cooperation and 'team spirit'. Despite the severe cold, I busied myself preparing loads for when we could continue to the second camp. A mass of equipment and supplies was needed: food, fuel, tents, ropes, ice axes, pitons, karabiners, and of course bottles of oxygen.

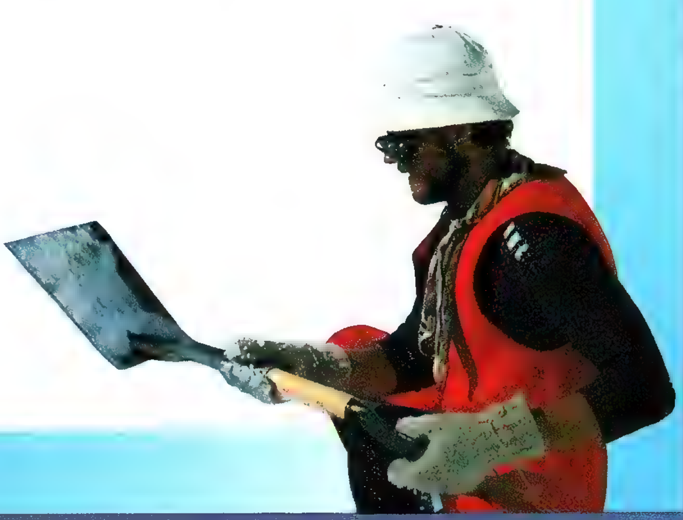
Grand Plan Aborted

After several days of work at the second camp at 6,300 metres, it came round to my turn to descend to base camp for a rest. This was at the end of October. Until the middle of the month the weather had been relatively stable but, when I reached base camp, I was told that the heaviest snowstorm in sixty years had just battered the areas around the second camp. The four expedition members still there at the time were working day and night in an effort to clear the masses of snow in order to save the equipment which we had all struggled so hard to get up there. Apparently, 3.3 metres of snow had fallen in a single night.

As the storm slowly died out, so too did our hopes for a successful ascent of Xixabangma. Nevertheless, our leader decided to let two members continue. They managed to reach an altitude of 7,700 metres and spent the night there in a snow hole. Unfortunately, one of them suffered frostbite in his fingers, and they had no choice but to abandon their attempt. Shortly after this setback, we received a telegram warning of another snowstorm on the way. For safety's sake, the expedition leader was forced to call off our attempt on the peak altogether.

The expedition broke up at Nyalam and everybody went their own way; I and seven other team members decided to return to Hong Kong via Lhasa and Beijing. Thus ended our almost two-month expedition to Mount Xixabangma.

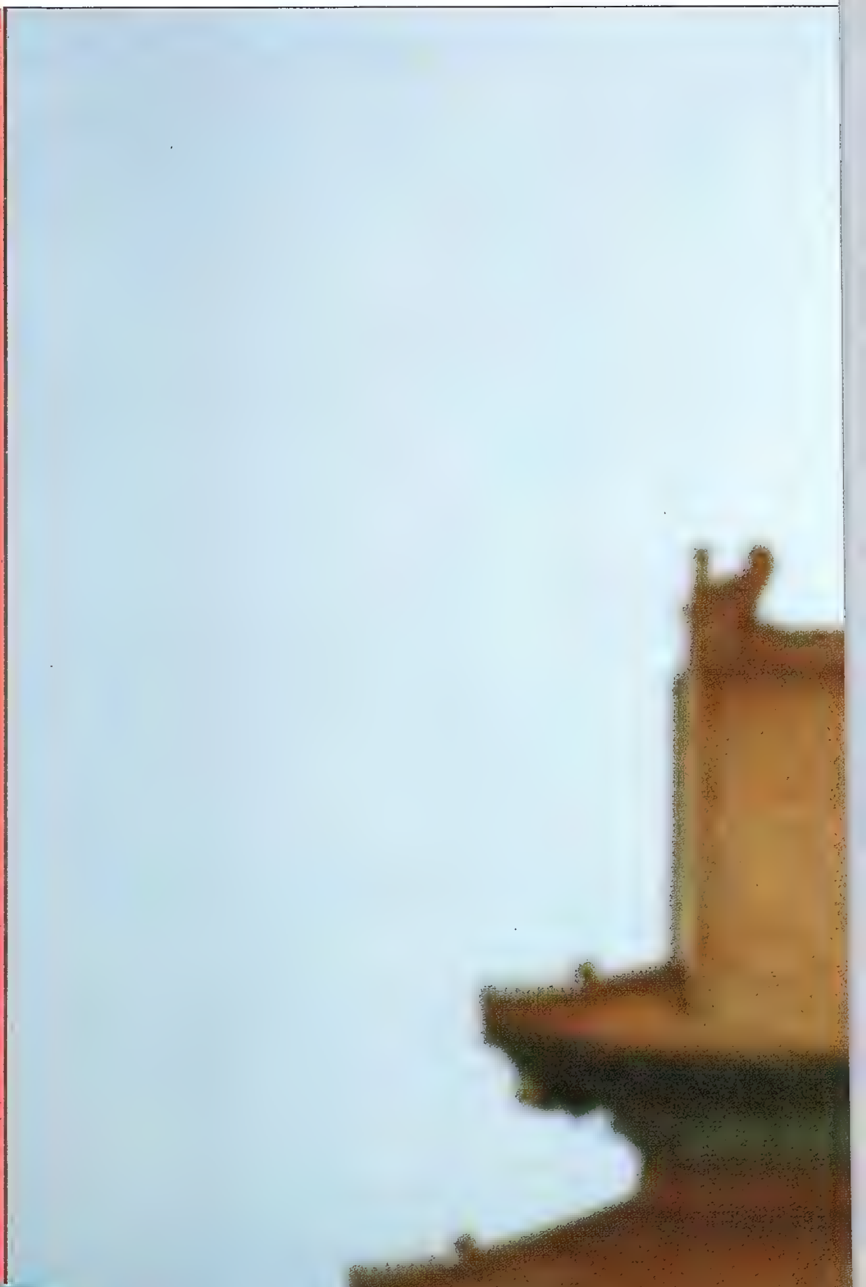
Translated by Chapman Lee



4

Great Wall, Here We Come!

PHOTOS & ARTICLE
BY TANG SHIZENG



Editor's Note:

Special-interest tours are nothing new in China, but one 'special interest' with a particularly evocative ring for the adventurous is the Great Wall.

The haphazard defensive fortifications which were linked up in a more organized way with the unification of China under the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.) were renovated extensively under the Ming (1368-1644). The Great Wall snakes right across northern China for more than 6,000 kilometres, from west of the Jiayu Pass in Gansu Province to Shanhaiguan on the east coast in Hebei Province. Many sections have now reverted to dust. However, due to their prime importance, the sections immediately north and northeast of Beijing have been kept in fairly good condition through the centuries. Nowadays, thanks to the Great Wall's new status as star of China's tourism industry, these sections have been first in line for renovation.

One of the great pleasures of a special tour is that it permits access to areas not yet opened up to individual travellers. There have now been several tours involving the Great Wall, but here we follow the day-to-day fortunes of the group which started this trend last year with the inaugural '*Marche de la Grande Muraille*'.

When Leslie and Agnes Garaudel of France proposed a 'Walk Along the Great Wall', the response was immediate and overwhelming. The sisters finally selected thirty men and seventeen women, fit amateur athletes all, mostly experienced in marathons and cross-country runs.

The journey was to start in the capital, Beijing, and end where the Great Wall runs out into the sea at Laolongtou (Old Dragon Head) in Hebei Province. Seven sections of the eastern part of the Great Wall would be covered, only three of which have so far been restored and opened to the general public. At an average of fifty kilometres a day, the group would cover a distance of over one thousand kilometres in twelve days, with occasional 'hops' by bus. How they covered it was up to them, this being as much an 'experience' as a serious competition. But there was a classification of sorts — men's running, men's walking, women's running, women's walking — and the winner of the last stage would be presented with a magnificent cup.

1987
21
JUNE

The forty-seven group members arrived in Beijing from Paris on June 20. First on the agenda was of course a visit to the Forbidden City, the heart of the capital. One of the group made an unfortunate start.... In his haste to take photos of this legendary palace of the emperors, he dropped a cigarette butt on the ground and was promptly fined fifty cents for littering! Unabashed, he stowed the receipt the policeman gave him away in his diary and vowed to cherish it for ever as a reminder of his visit.

1987
22
JUNE

The group assembled in Tian'anmen Square bright and early for a ceremony to mark the start of the event. Then it was time to be taken out by bus to the actual starting point — the Juyong Pass, sixty kilometres northwest of Beijing.

At a run they started along the road, then scaled the mountain to get on to the

WIW
LA MARCHE DE LA
GRANDE MURAILLE
WIW

Photo by Gu Shengtian

Photo by Chen Donglin

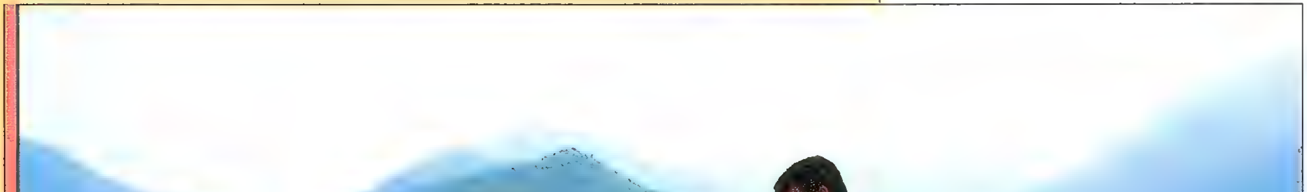


Photo by Dong Zonggui

Great Wall, continuing north in the direction of Badaling over increasingly precipitous terrain. One of the female participants, Pascale, took the lead, leaving the rest far behind.

They seemed to have plenty of energy on this first stretch, Christian Béarde skipping and hopping from one parapet to the next. The Great Wall at Badaling is very thick and solid, typical of the building techniques of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The wall here is almost eight metres high and it is 6.5 metres wide at the bottom, narrowing slightly towards the top. Badaling is in fact the highest point along the entire length of the Great Wall.

The group stayed the night at the Tianshoushan Hotel near the Ming Tombs. From now on, they would camp out.

1987
23
JUNE

Bridging the gap by bus, the group reached the start of their next stage, Huairou, in light rain. Undaunted, they trudged through the mud towards Mutianyu, fifty kilometres away. Local farmers were astonished at the unusual sight of all these foreigners walking in the drizzle and one kind-hearted tractor driver indicated that he would be more than happy to give them a lift!

As they neared Mutianyu the weather cleared up and soon the sun was burning down. Next they had to scale the mountain following the line of the new cable car. Mutianyu has been opened up recently with the intention of relieving the strain on Badaling which, as the nearest site to Beijing, bears the full brunt of the world's interest in this astonishing feat of construction.

Because of the recent rain, mud and damp moss made the going hazardous as the group ventured beyond the restored areas. Blistered feet started to make themselves felt, and there were a few falls on the slippery surface. The doctors accompanying the group, themselves tiring rapidly, were kept busy patching people up.

At the end of the stage everyone collapsed for a rest except for one energetic individual, Alain, who spotted a pedlar selling fans by the roadside. After much bargaining he succeeded in buying three painted silk fans for six yuan — a feat he boasted about for days afterwards!

Dusk fell. The group camped in an orchard beside the mountain, doing their cooking on portable gas stoves. The setting was pastoral, the peace very nearly complete except for the bleating of goats grazing nearby.

1987
24
JUNE

After breakfast, the day's stage started from the foot of Mutianyu. First the group members had to run up the 1,200 steps to reach the Great Wall, here built directly on the crest of the mountain. Then they struck out towards the southeast, scaling ridge after ridge until they dropped down into a ravine. Another orchard provided pleasant shade, a gentle breeze rustling the leaves of the trees.

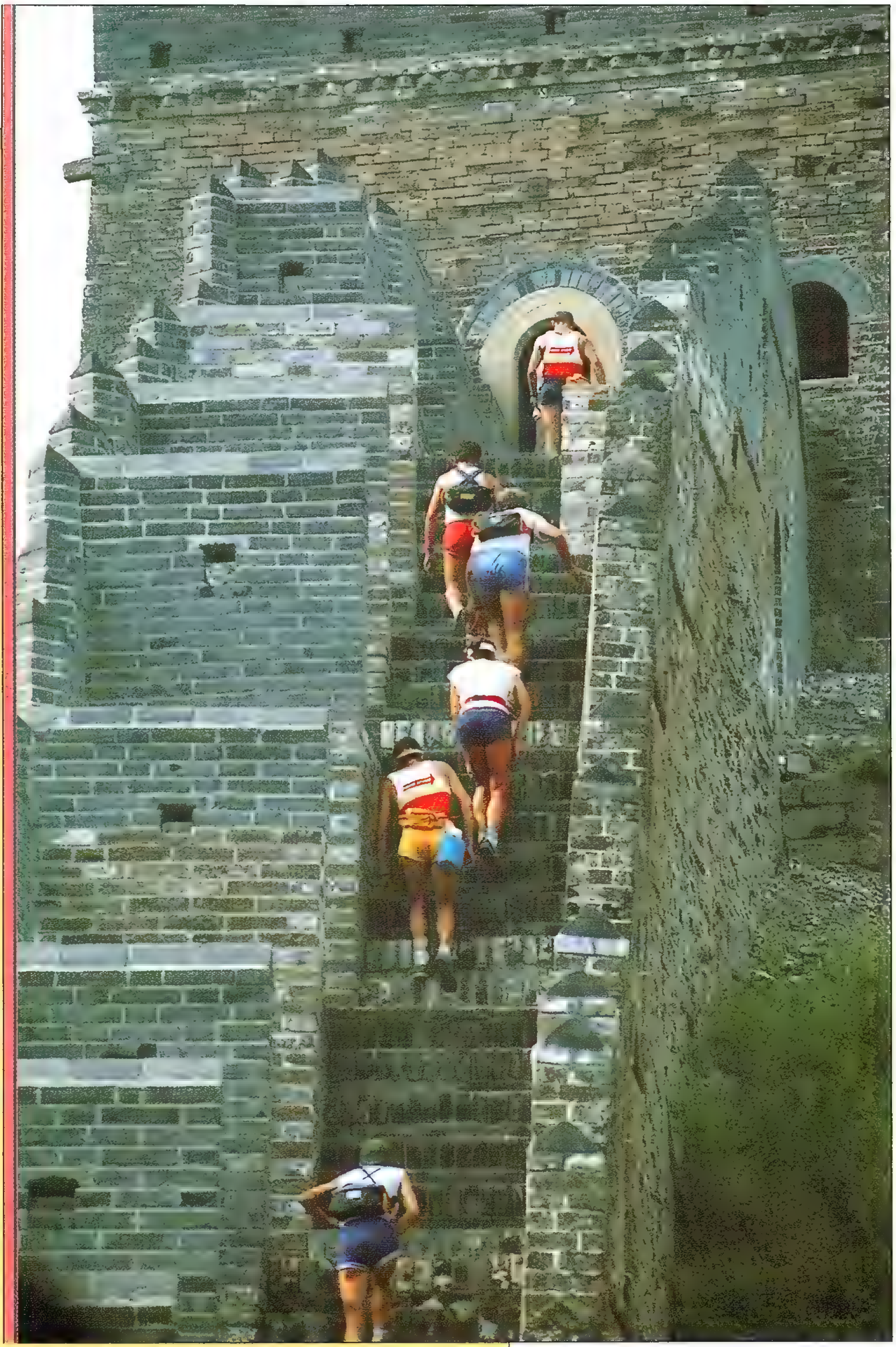
The group now took to the road. Scenes of village life flashed past them: a farmer and his young son sifting grain from the recent harvest; a tiny boy who, infected by the excitement, joined them for a while; teenagers lounging on the balustrade of a bridge who applauded as they passed, encouraging them to greater exertions.

In the evening the group set up camp in the courtyard of an electricity substation at the village of Tiange in western Miyun County. Looking for entertainment, some of the young men in the group wandered through the village and came across a game of billiards. Sign language was more than sufficient for communication and they were soon engrossed in a contest with local youngsters.

1987
25
JUNE

Another rainy morning as the group passed along the banks of the Miyun Reservoir, an artificial lake currently being developed as a scenic tourist area. The afternoon saw the group arriving by bus at Jinshanling, where they camped in the shadow of the Great Wall.

This section of the wall is said to have been built by Qi Jiguang (1528-1587), a Ming-dynasty general. Most of his soldiers stationed here were from the south, and they missed their hometown, Jinshan (Golden Hill). To assuage their homesickness, Qi Jiguang named the section Jinshanling. In the glow of the setting sun, the place certainly lived up to its name.



At a late hour, some local dancers performed a fan dance for the guests. Afterwards, group members joined in the fun, attempting to learn the dance sequences and proving good students.

1987
26
JUNE

Early in the morning, the group climbed up to the Great Wall at Jinshanling. Watch-towers rose through the sea of mist in a variety of shapes. The wall here is very impressive, seven metres high and six metres wide.

By the afternoon, all the participants except one had arrived at the day's destination. After a while, having searched here and there without luck, the rest of the group became worried that something serious had happened. A search party set out, consisting of one of the doctors and a couple of the press photographers attached to the group. Heindl was eventually found a dozen kilometres behind in a dilapidated watch-tower. He was perfectly okay. He was just reluctant to leave a place with such enchanting scenery!

The campsite was at the Taishitun Primary School. The facilities were poor, but the fresh, clean air of the countryside more than compensated for the inconvenience.

A young Swiss participant kept up his hobby of collecting Chinese objects during the trip. At some point he had bought an abacus — the problem was, he didn't know how to use it. One of the pupils at the school offered to teach him and, even without the benefit of a common language, he quickly learned how to add and subtract. The more complicated calculations, however, proved a different matter.

1987
27
JUNE

The morning started with a run along the highway leading to Zunhua in Hebei Province. On the way the group passed an ancient mausoleum, possibly part of the enormous complex known as Qing Dongling (Eastern Qing Tombs), which covers an area of 2,500 square kilometres in this part of the country. Grass and trees grow along the 'spirit way' there, which is lined with stone statues including horses, elephants and camels. These centuries-old relics seemed to gaze down on the foreigners running by with as much curiosity as the local population.

The group camped for the night by the dam at the Daheju Reservoir.

1987
28
JUNE

An alarming start to the day! The local authorities sent a message early on to the effect that the water level in the reservoir was rising rapidly and that the sluice gates would have to be opened to relieve the pressure. The group was requested to evacuate the area immediately.

The excitement (and breakfast) over, the group set off by bus for Luowenyu, from where they climbed up on to the wall. For a distance of more than ten kilometres the area was completely deserted — no signs of human habitation. The section of the Great Wall at this point, which crosses four mountain ridges, is most perilous due to its badly dilapidated state. It proved the most arduous part of the entire trip.

Marie-Jeanne, a physical education teacher from a French middle school, succeeded in climbing the second ridge and was just preparing to tackle another watch-tower when she stepped on a loose brick and fell, rolling down the slope all covered with sharp rubble and stones. Her arm and legs were badly bruised and grazed but she simply bandaged the worst wit handkerchiefs and continued her descent There was no actual path downhill and th overgrown slope was very steep but nothing daunted, she continued to blaz a way for the others to follow.

There was a more serious injury alon this stretch. One young Frenchman Claude, slipped and broke his leg. Th doctor was quickly on the scene to set i in plaster. This was where the back-u vehicles came in handy!

The rest of the group continued. A they passed the village of Hongxiaokou some of them took the opportunity to look in on the children in their classroom.

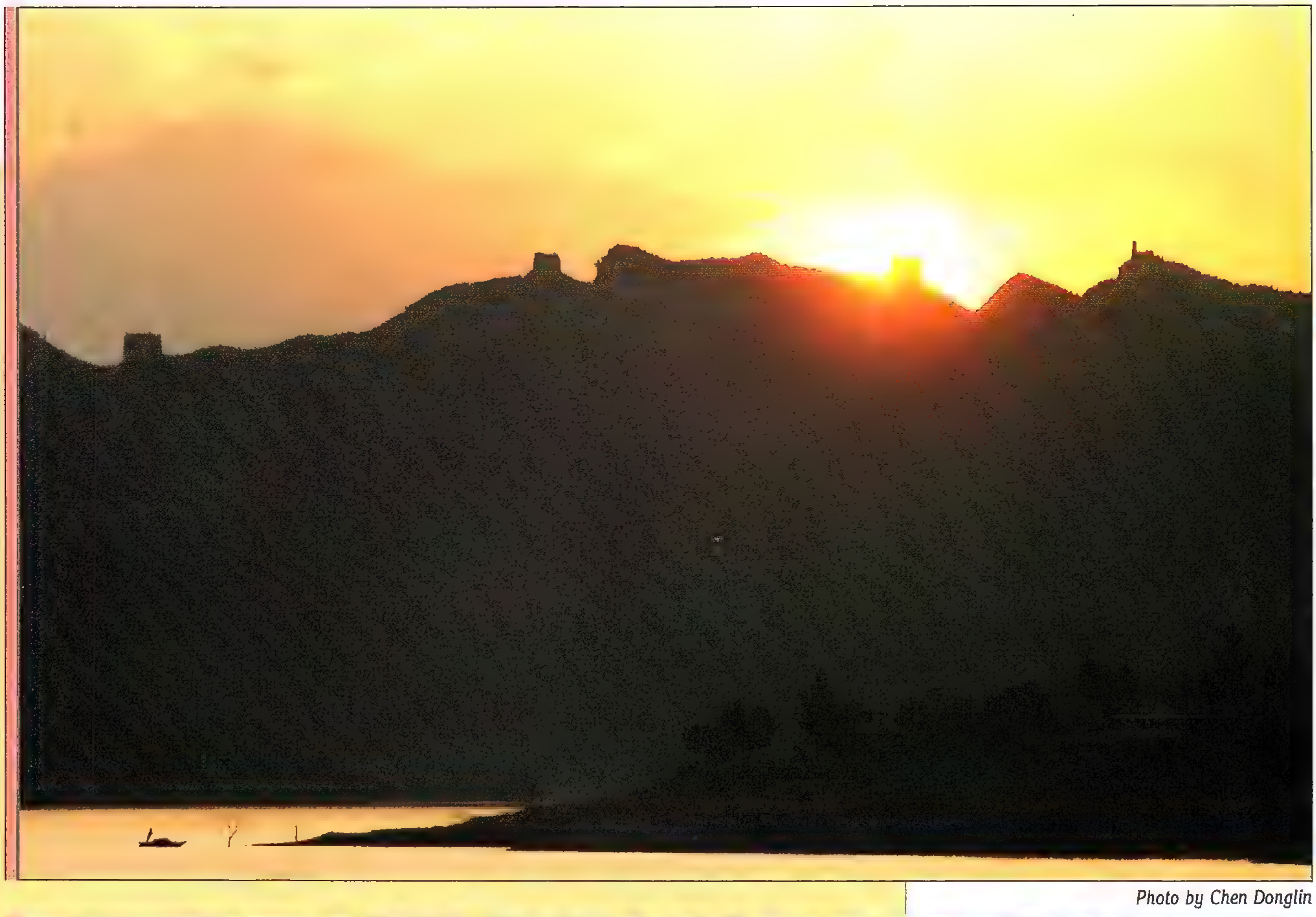


Photo by Chen Donglin

Photo by Chen Donglin

1987
29
JUNE

Overnight it rained heavily, water seeping into the tents and soaking everything and everybody. Cameras had to be wrapped in plastic, and it was a matter of sitting there, drenched to the skin, and praying for the rain to stop. This was a really big storm, with heavy gusts of wind.

Dawn came at last. And with it the dramatic news of floodwaters on the way. Everyone jumped to their feet, dismantled the tents and bundled into the bus as quickly as possible to leave the danger area.

A good half-day's bus ride between the mountains took the group to Zunhua, south of the Great Wall. The group members stayed in a guesthouse for once in an effort to dry out their soaked sleeping-bags, quilts and clothes.

But then, once the sun came out, it was pleasant to sit on the flagstones and talk over the experiences of the dreadful night in comfort.

1987
30
JUNE

Morning saw the group set off — again by bus — for the section of the Great Wall at Xifengkou. A forty-kilometre stage lay ahead of them. The dilapidated ramparts here were overgrown with weeds. It was necessary to move with care on the slippery, grass-covered parts, but later the group was able to start running.

Guess what? It started to rain again!

One rather elderly French TV reporter, in the effort to get ahead of the group and take interesting pictures, was most ingenious in using local transport. He asked a farmer for a ride on his tractor; he also managed to cadge a lift in a truck. He even rode pillion for a way on a local lad's bicycle.

The group later camped on the dam at the Panjiakou Reservoir.

1987
1
JULY

The first thing was an early-morning boat-ride on the Panjiakou Reservoir, the largest on the upper reaches of a project to divert water from the River Luanhe to the city of Tianjin to the southwest. At the far end of the scenic expanse of water was the famous sight where a section of the Great Wall runs down into the water, only to continue up the opposite bank. This is actually the Xifeng Pass.

The group went ashore at this point, and climbed up on to the wall where it emerged from the lake. The particularly sturdy watchtowers along this stretch are also said to have been the work of Qi Jiguang. One of the French participants was heard to ask plaintively: 'Why did they let such a fine section of the Great Wall be submerged by the waters of the reservoir?'

Noon, and time for lunch at the restaurant at the reservoir, which not surprisingly specializes in fish dishes. Lunch over, it was time to continue running along the road.

The group camped for the night near another reservoir, Daheiting. And again the heavens opened ... there was certainly no shortage of water on this trip!

1987
2
JULY

The group continued along the roads, starting in Qianxi and passing through Fengrun and Changli before reaching the area of Qinhuangdao. The Garaudel sisters, initiators of the event, complained that so much travel along the roads had not been part of the plan. As they felt this was a deviation from the original spirit of their idea, taking them well away from the line of the Great Wall, they refused to participate.

In the evening the group camped on the shores of the man-made Lake Yansai close to Shanhaiguan, only about eighteen kilometres north of Qinhuangdao and within reach of the salt-laden breezes from the Bohai Sea.

1987
3
JULY

The big day dawned — the last, eight-kilometre stage would determine the overall winner! First the group crossed the lake by boat and climbed Mount Jiaoshan, a steep haul. By the time they reached the summit, they were wet through with dew. This section of the Great Wall has been renovated only recently and, due to the sharp angle, iron walkways which are practically ladders have been installed at many points. The mist drifting by below their feet made some of the competitors feel quite giddy! It was windy up on the wall and they were soon chilled to the bone, their dew-soaked clothes clinging to their bodies.

Still, even in their discomfort, they did not forget it was time for the last push. André Sourdon, a baker by profession, rushed down the iron steps at dazzling speed, and was the first to arrive in a sprint finish at the main gate to the Shanhai Pass, where he was duly acclaimed victor.

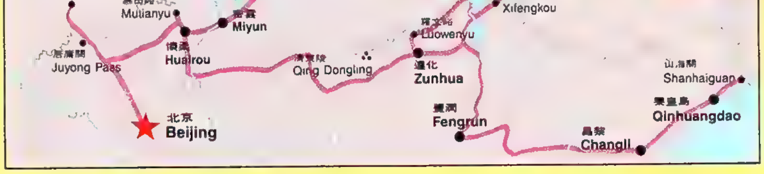
But this heavily fortified eastern point on the Great Wall, known as the 'First Pass under Heaven', was still not quite the end of the story. At noon, the Garaudel sisters and the rest of the group members, together with the reporters and pho-

Photo by Gu Shengtian

tographers who had followed their every step and stumble, celebrated with champagne at Laolongtou, the 'head' of the 'dragon'. There, four kilometres south of Shanhaiguan, the Great Wall finally dips into the Bohai Sea. It too has run its course....

Translated by Yu Zai Xin

Map of route of Great Wall journey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金山嶺
Jinshanling
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Badaling
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Miyun
居庸關
Juyong Pass
懷柔
Huairou
清東陵
Qing Dongling
羅文峪
Luowenyu
遵化
Zunhua
喜峰口
Xifengkou
山海關
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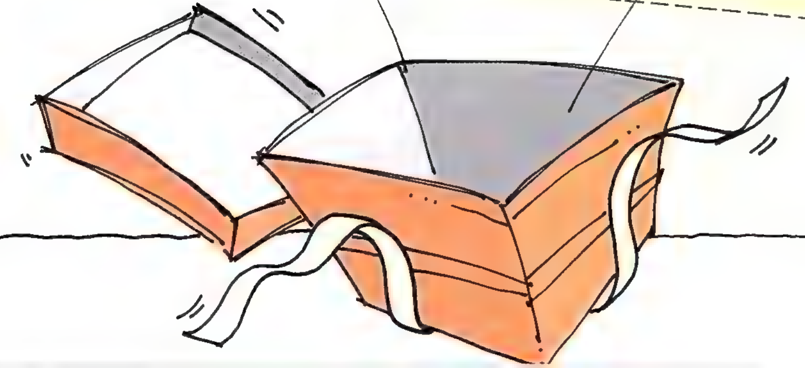


ANNIVERSARY SHOWCASE

Celebrate our 100th anniversary with us in these following pages as leading photographers from the mainland and Hong Kong share their personal vision of aspects of China as captured through the camera lens.

Blossom of the kapok tree

Tchan Fou-li

'Buddha's halo'

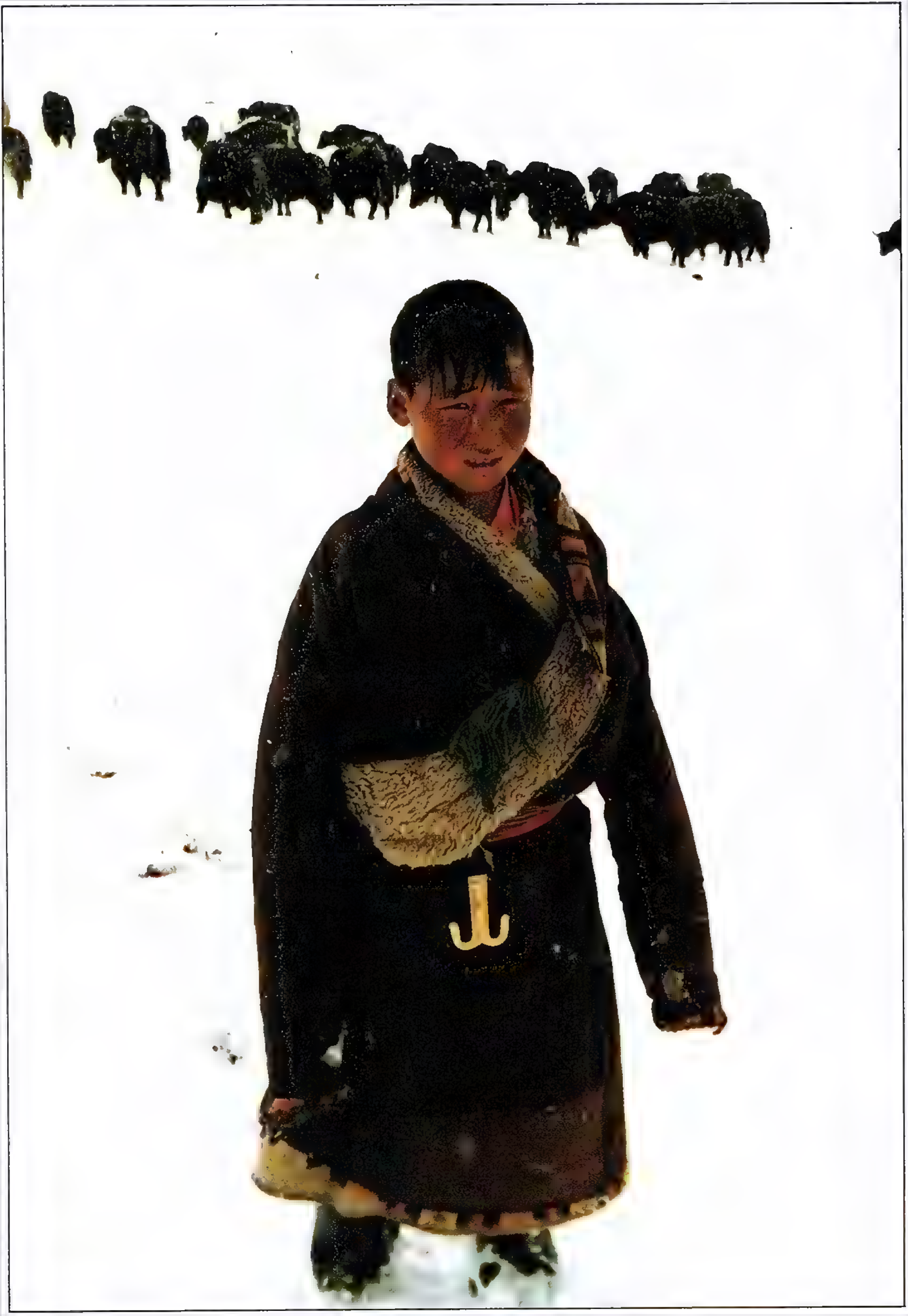
Zhang Runguo

A Gansu sunset

Zheng Yunfeng

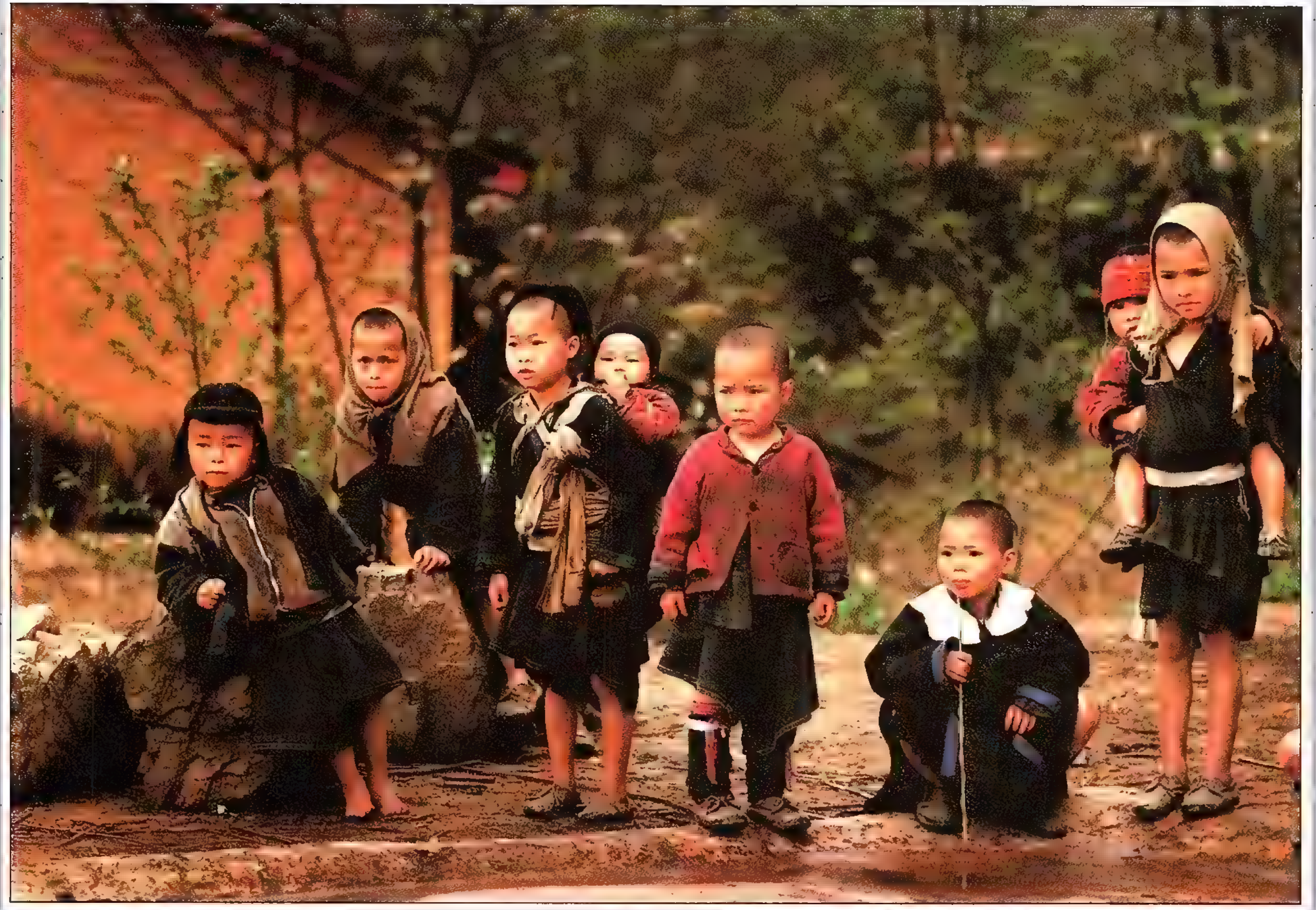
Where rivers meet in Tibet

Che Fu



Herding yaks in Gansu

Zhang Daoyuan

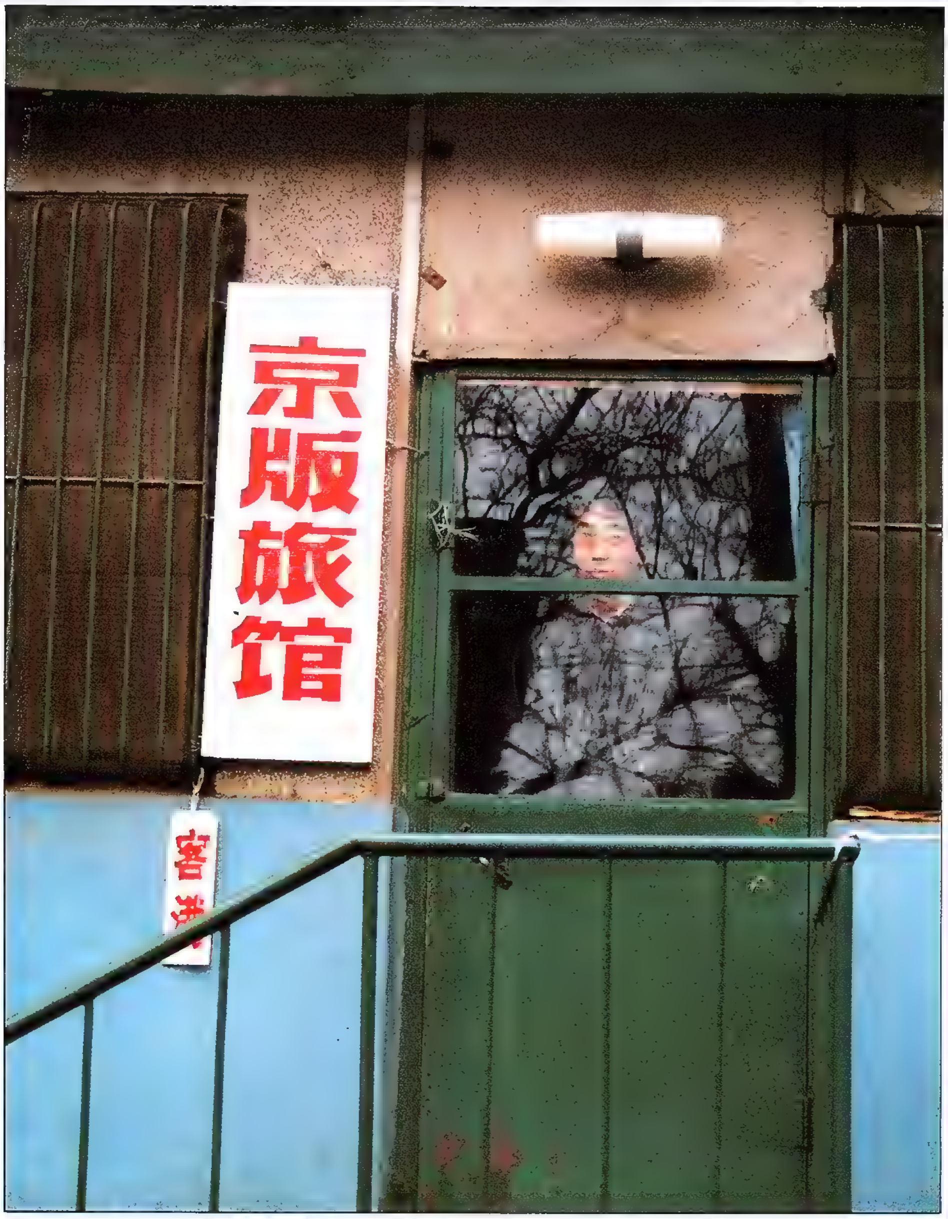


Awaiting the visitor from afar

Lee Kung Kim

Man and nature work in harmony

Xie Lixing



'Full house' for a Beijing guesthouse

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Nanjing forest in autumn

Danny Chan

Children of the waves (Guangdong)

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The perfection of the lotus

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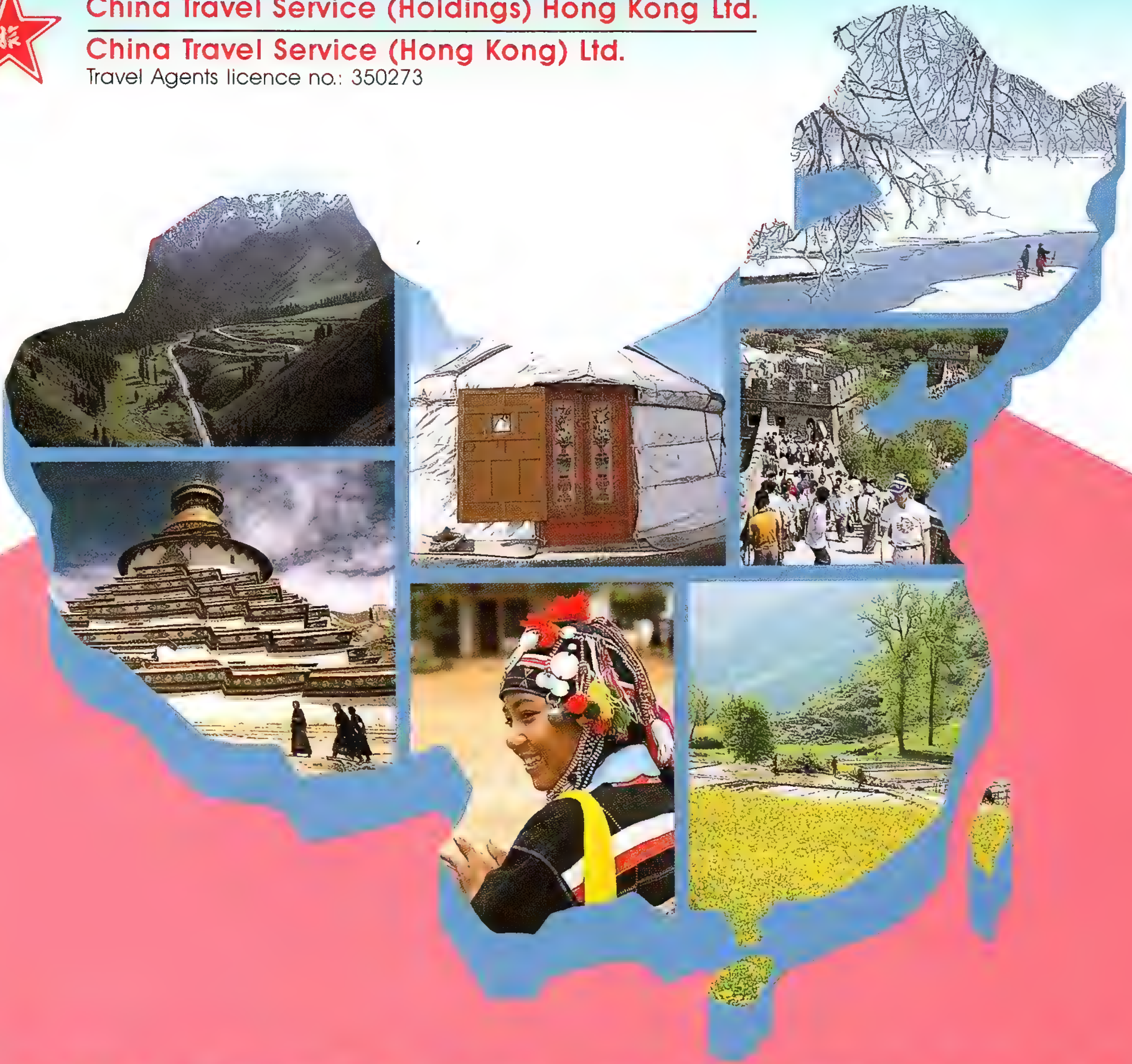

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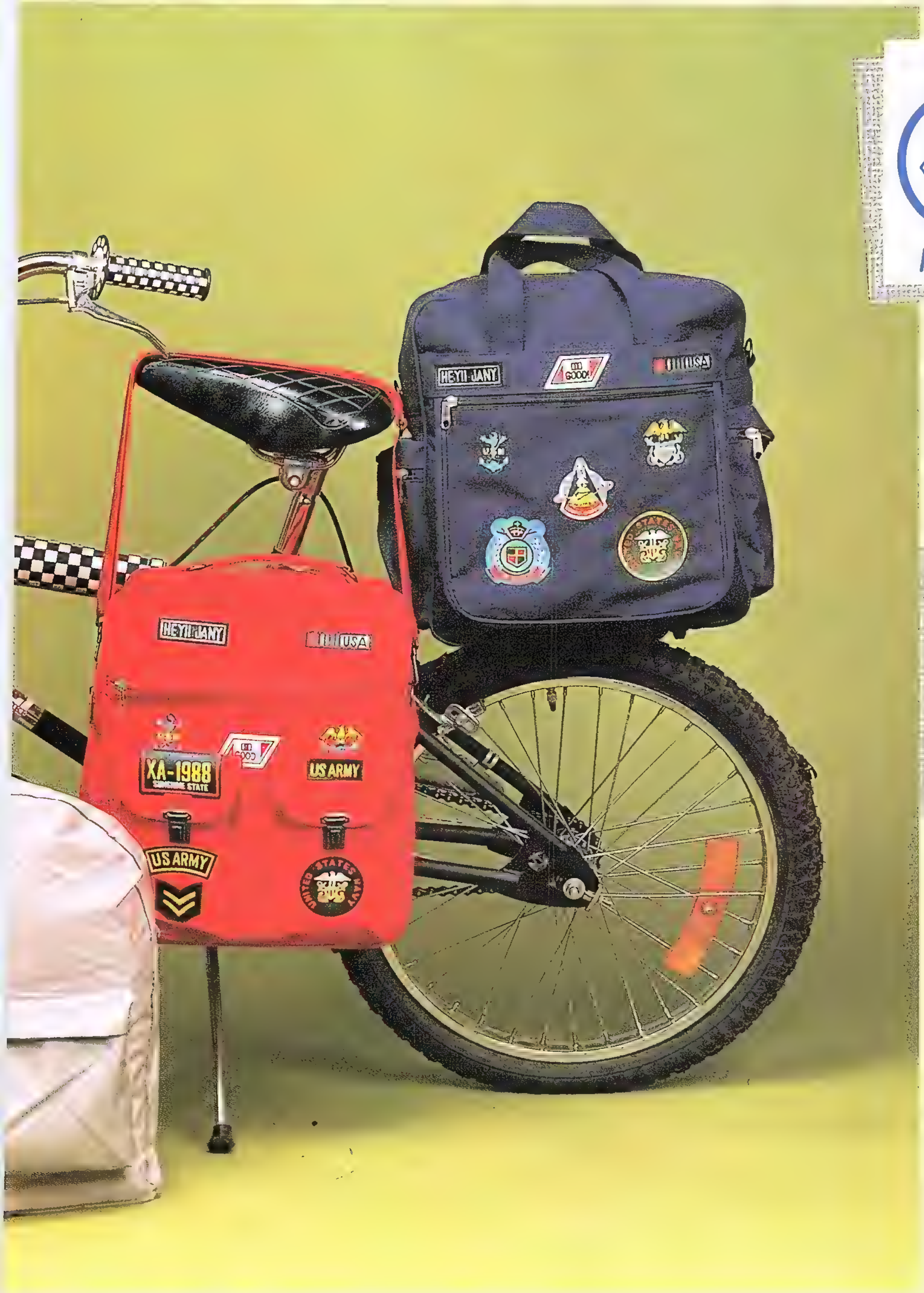
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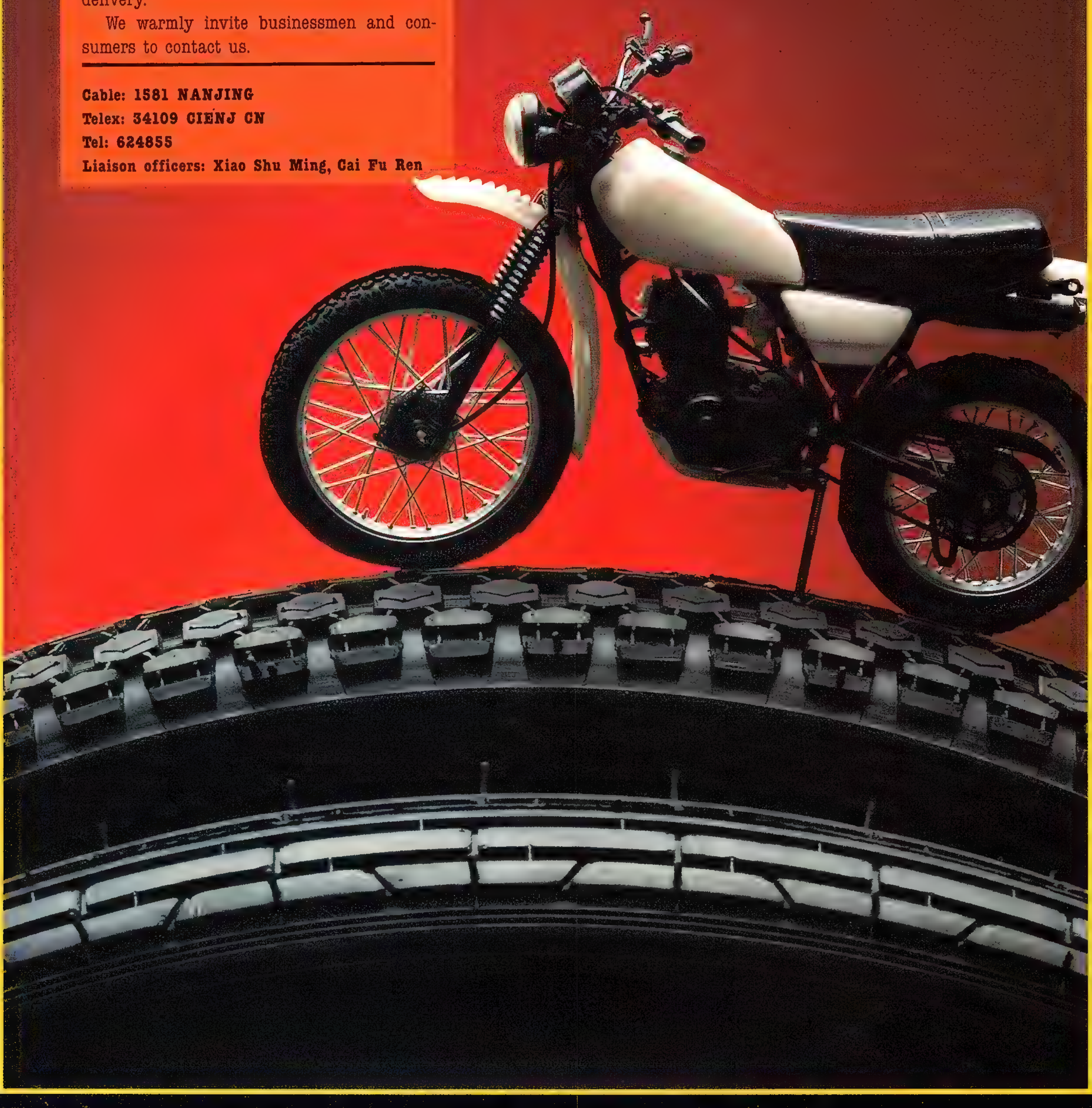

BEIJING MARCO POLO SHOP

The Beijing Marco Polo Shop, a retail department of the Beijing Arts & Crafts Imp. & Exp. Corporation, boasts a history of more than fifty years and has long enjoyed a good reputation both at home and abroad.

As is well known, Marco Polo (1254-1324) was a famous Italian traveller and adventurer who in 1271 undertook a long and difficult journey to China, where he stayed for seventeen years. As he was highly regarded by the Yuan emperor Shizu (Kublai Khan), he was put in an important position which enabled him to travel throughout the country. After his return to Venice, he completed his world-renowned report *The Travels*, which eventually widened the European field of vision and contributed greatly to Sino-Western contacts. It is therefore understandable that the Chinese people of later generations were pleased to name shops 'Marco Polo' in commemoration of the friendly Venetian traveller.

As early as the 1930s, the Beijing Marco Polo Shop distinguished itself by its high-grade arts and crafts, jewellery and carpets. On sale there is a wide variety of traditional Chinese handicrafts, newly-crafted works of art and reproductions of antiques which include: cloisonné ware, ivory carvings, jade and semi-precious stone carvings, miniature landscapes with real rocks, carved lacquerware, calligraphers' accessories, various exquisite handicrafts, carpets, silk rugs and tapestries, embroidered Mandarin coats and mats, porcelain, jewellery, fur and leather garments, silk, inlaid gold lacquer furniture & hardwood furniture, Christmas gifts and souvenirs.

Engaged both in retail and wholesale trade, the shop sincerely welcomes clients dealing in arts and crafts from all over the world to hold trade discussions. For the convenience of diplomatic envoys and commercial representatives to China and also foreign tourists wishing to make purchases, the shop is happy to render various kinds of service. A 5% discount or more will be offered in accordance with the volume of business concluded.

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Life in the Palm Grove

ARTICLE BY HU YUE

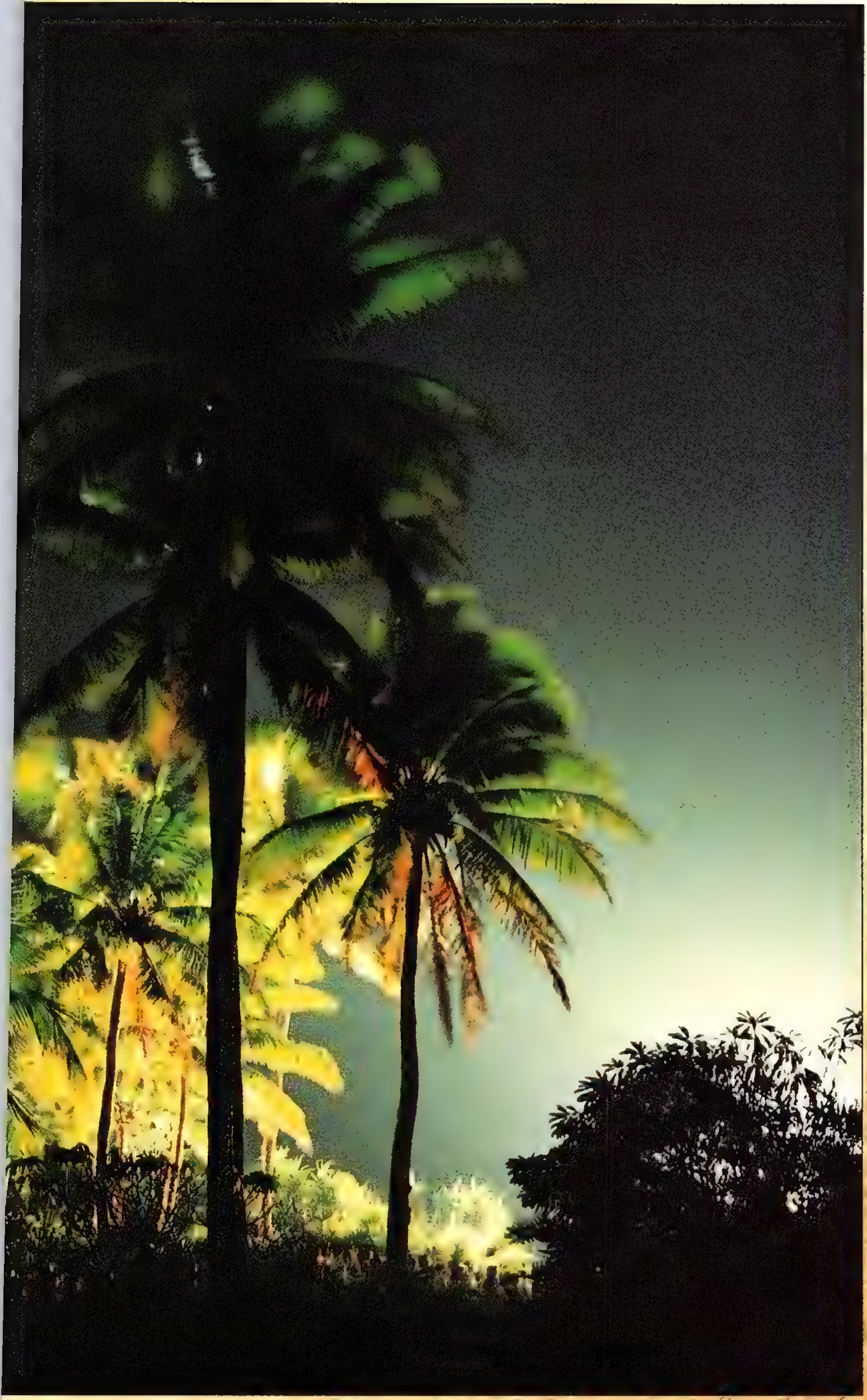
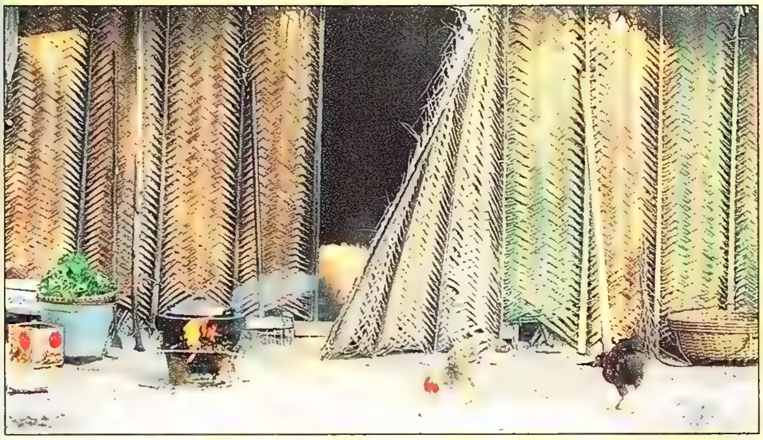


Photo by Xing Ji

Morning mist filters through the coastal palms (1, by Liao Ning); as the village children read (2), their mothers pack coconut candy (3, by Wang Miao). Woven palmleaf mats shelter a corner of the compound (4) (2 and 4 by Lin Hongnian).

3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Within China, Hainan Island is characterized by its coconut palms which cover almost twenty thousand hectares, yielding up to sixty million coconuts annually. Half these palms grow in and around Wenchang County in the east, but the area around the village of Jianhuashan near the port of Qinglan holds the densest concentration of all.

It is said that coconuts have been planted on Hainan Island for well over two thousand years and, indeed, the land in this area is almost entirely given over to palm-trees. The fact is that this is one of the most versatile of tropical cash crops. The white 'meat' is dried and widely used in cookery, and valuable coconut oil can be extracted for use in cooking fat, soap, candles, and so on. Coconut milk and coconut cream are also important culinary products. In addition, the stalk of the tree can be tapped to obtain a sugary sap which makes palm-sugar but can also be fermented to produce an alcoholic drink known as toddy.

Apart from their use as simple containers, the empty shells are made into ornaments sold as tourist souvenirs. What is more, the fibre from the husk of the nut can be used for ropes and brooms and the palm leaves woven into fans, baskets and mats. There is no end to its uses! Some of the most popular and tasty products are the triangular-shaped preserved coconut candies which Chinese people offer friends and relatives at Lunar New Year.

Mist-Shrouded Groves

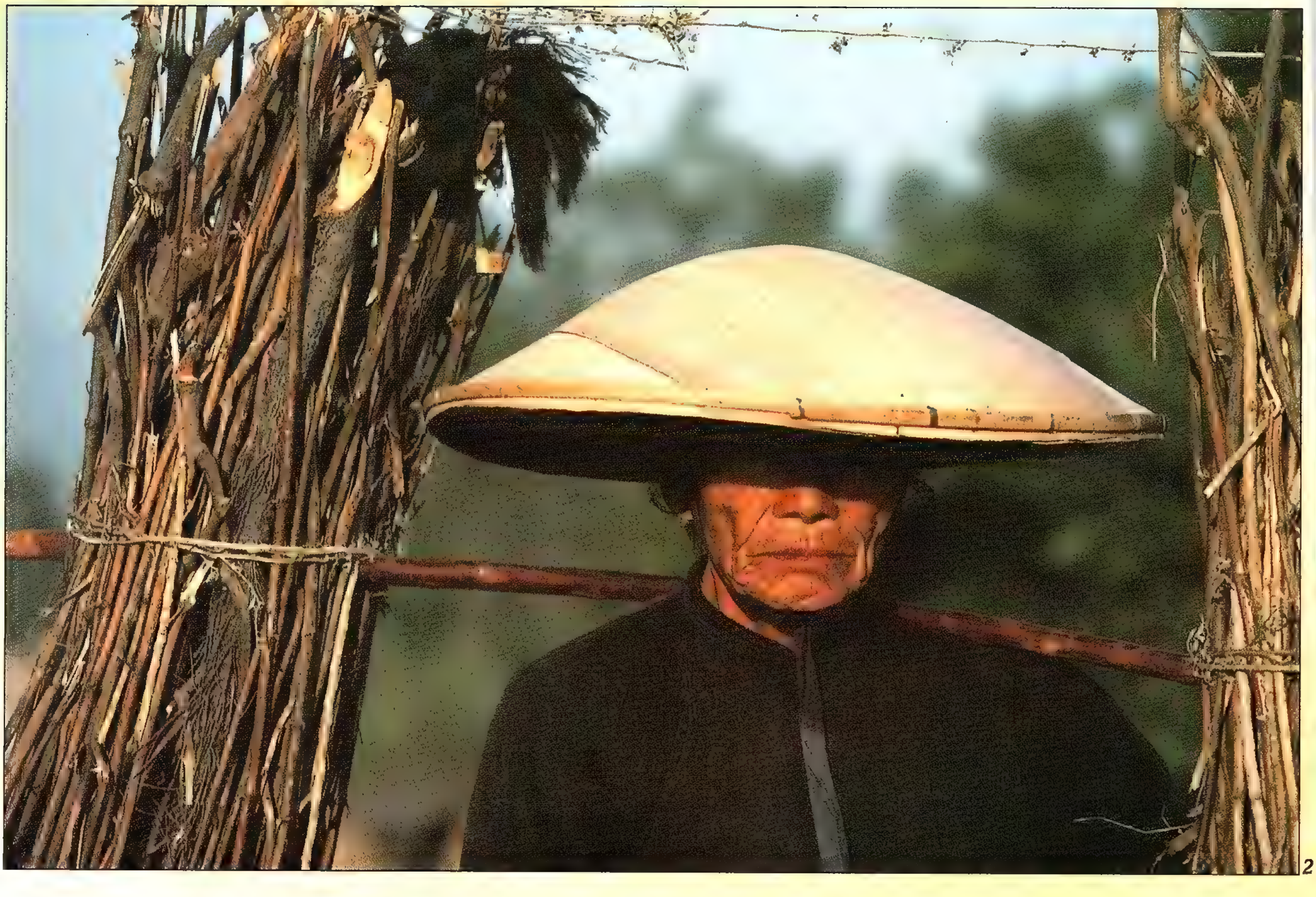
It was March, early spring, when I set foot in Qinglan. Fishing junks lay on the quiet beach, while the coconut palms on the opposite bank of the estuary seemed to lean wearily under the heavy burden of the mist.

Entering the plantation, I discerned moving shadows which turned out to be fishermen pulling a small boat up on to the shore. The mist was so thick that it would have been easy to lose my way in the huge plantation. But I knew that there were plenty of people living there, so I pressed ahead boldly.

Soon afterwards a man passed me at a gentle amble on the back of a buffalo and I followed him. His destination turned out to be a hamlet of less than twenty households. After some initial surprise at seeing me materialize

1

There is much and varied work to be done: ploughing (1, by Liu Weixiong), collecting firewood (2, by Wang Miao), transporting coconuts (3, by Deng Daduan) and patching up the fishing boats (4, by Chan Yat Nin).



2

like that out of the mist, the villagers became very friendly. One family even invited me to stay the night.

Everything in their house — chairs, tables, cupboards, window frames — was made from some part of the coconut palm. Even the wooden floor was carved from palm-tree trunks. I suppose I must have looked surprised, because my host smiled and said, 'Well, what do you expect? There's no way of avoiding it — we just have too many coconut palms around here'.

Dinner that night was a delicious rice dish with shredded coconut, washed down with toddy.

A Coconut-Based Lifestyle

The next morning I was wandering around in the village when I came across a roughly built open shed amid the palms. Coconuts were arranged in huge piles on the ground, and the villagers were busy cutting them open to extract the snow-white flesh to be boiled and processed. At the height of operations, the entire village would be roped in to set up simple stoves in the clearing. The air was filled with the fragrance of boiling coconut.

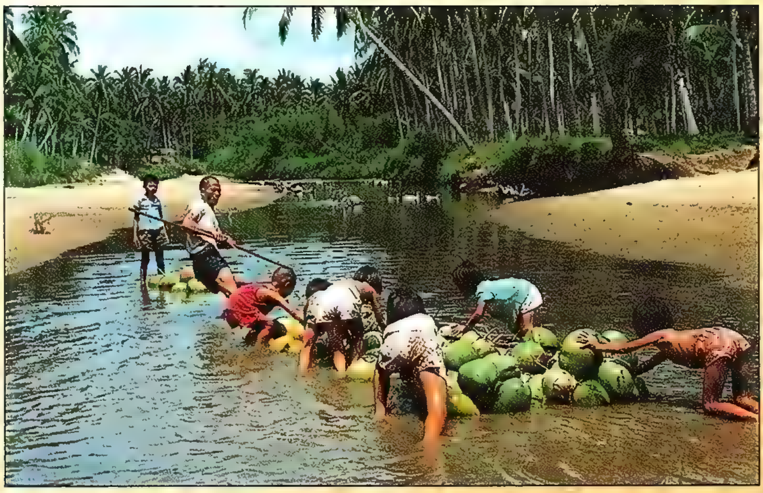
Hammocks are a common sight in the village, hanging between the palm-trees. Most of the hammocks, which are made from old fishing nets, are sheltered by a raised platform thatched with palm fronds. This makes a wonderful playground for the local children and gives them a place to read and rest.

The people here do not just earn their living from coconuts; they also fish and there is a boatyard in the plantation. When it is time to harvest the coconuts, however, the men all stay on land, as it is their job to shin up the trees and cut down the nuts with sharp knives.

The plantation is intersected by a network of rivers and streams which facilitate transportation of the coconuts. After the nuts have been collected, the villagers string them together, dump them into the waterway, where they float, and just pull them to their destination, often given a helping hand by one or more children actually wading along in the water. This is obviously much less trouble than hoisting the heavy loads onto a cart.

As I left the plantation, I met an old lady carrying a load of firewood. I noticed her broad hat and looked at it questioningly. She confirmed my suspicion: 'Yes indeed, it's made of coconut — the bark of the tree....' What else in this world of coconuts?

Translated by M.K.



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4

An Ancient Fortified Town: Pingyao

PHOTOS BY CHAN YAT NIN
ARTICLE BY YA SHAN

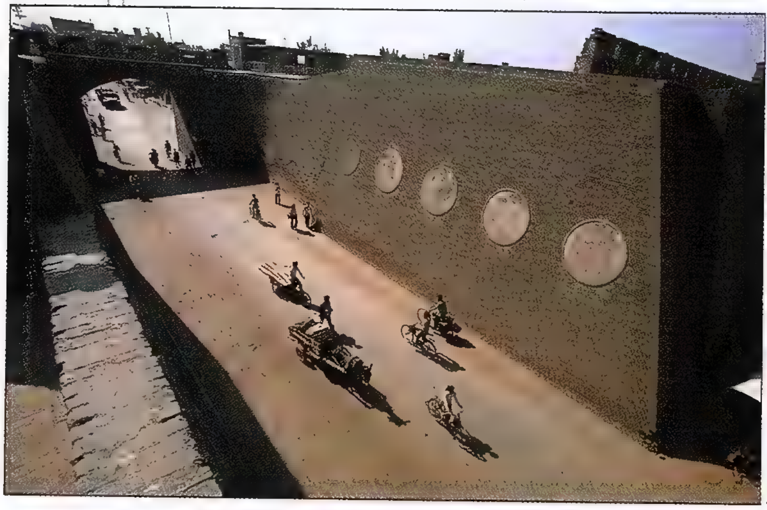
1

The ancient town of Pingyao, sixty kilometres south of the provincial capital, Taiyuan, in central Shanxi, is one of the four best preserved in China, along with Xi'an in Shaanxi, Jiangling in Hubei and Xingcheng in Liaoning. Founded in the Western Zhou dynasty (c. 11th century-771 B.C.), it was expanded under the Ming (1368-1644) for defensive purposes, and its walls, streets and lanes still retain the appearance and general flavour of a Ming country town.

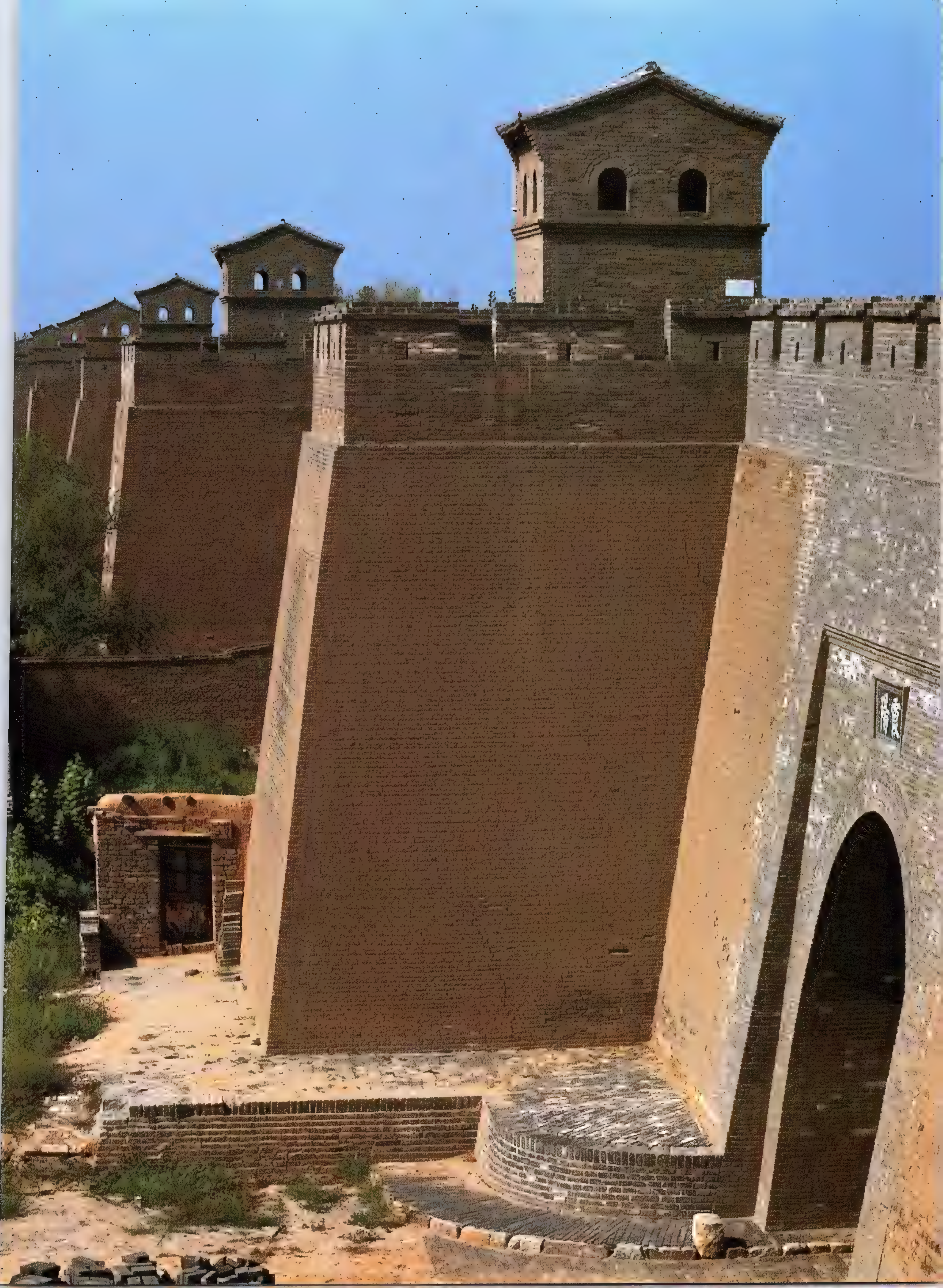
Walls Rising Over the Plain

From Taiyuan I took a southbound train. Not far beyond Yuci, massive city walls could be seen rising above the Central Shanxi Plain: the first signs of Pingyao. Walking into town from the station I passed green fields and rows of trees with luxuriant foliage all along the way, and the country air was pleasantly relaxing.

The design of Pingyao's walls is most unusual. With a circumference of 6.4 kilometres, the walls — laid out on a square plan — are twelve metres high and five metres thick. Entering the town from the east, I passed through two gateways of a barbican type. There are two similar entrances along the west wall, while the north and south walls each have only one of these gateways. From a bird's-eye view the town would resemble a turtle, the south gate forming the head and the north gate, where the outer entrance curves sharply to the east, the tail.



Effective defences in times gone by, Pingyao's walls and tunnel-like entranceways still stand proud (1, 2, 3).



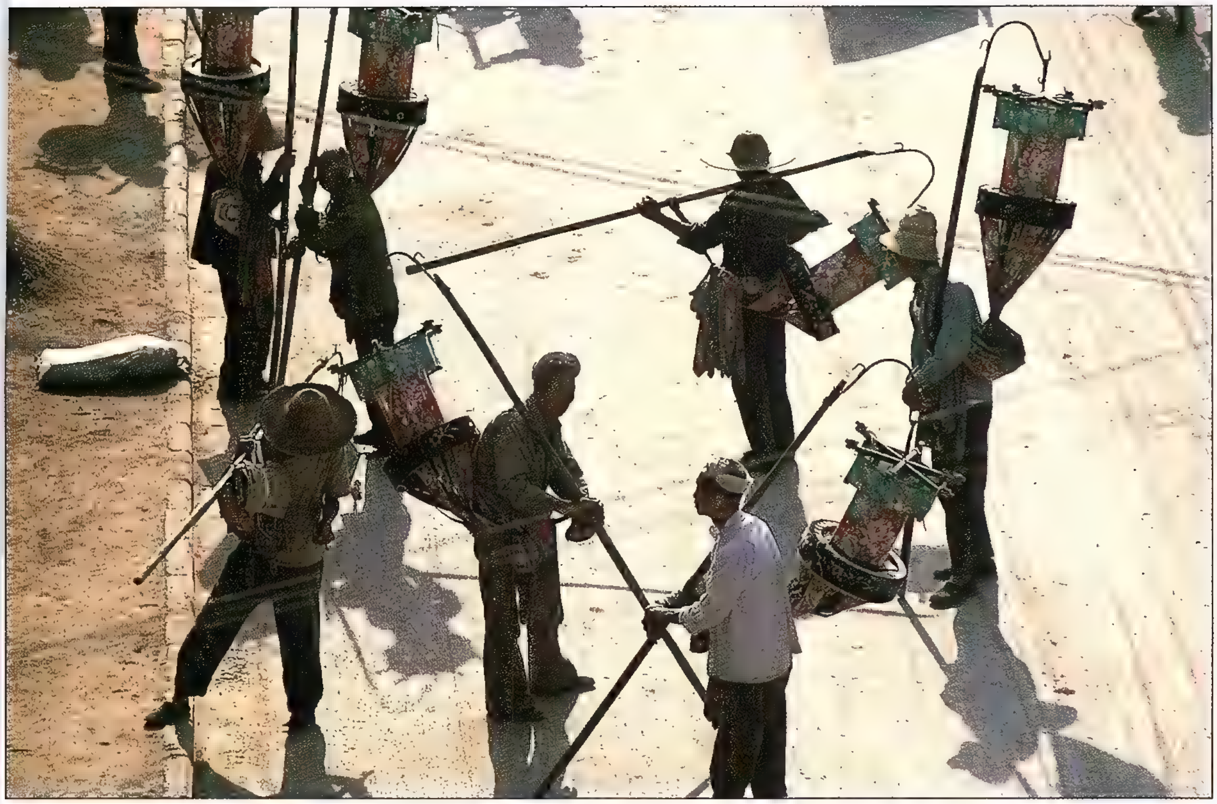
Climbing up on the wall, I saw that every hundred paces there was a projecting platform surmounted by a two-storey turret over five metres tall, equipped with arrow slots on all sides. There are seventy-two of these turrets and three thousand individual crenellations along the walls. The story goes that the architect, who was a follower of Confucius, intended these to symbolize the seventy-two favoured disciples out of the master's total of three thousand students. The town's defences were supplemented by a moat three metres deep and as much wide.

Self-Sufficiency in Isolation

After a brisk turn around the walls I descended into the town itself. There are six main streets (North, South, East, West, Zhengfu and Chenhuang Streets), each leading to one of the entrances, all of them narrow, not having been altered since Ming times.

1

2



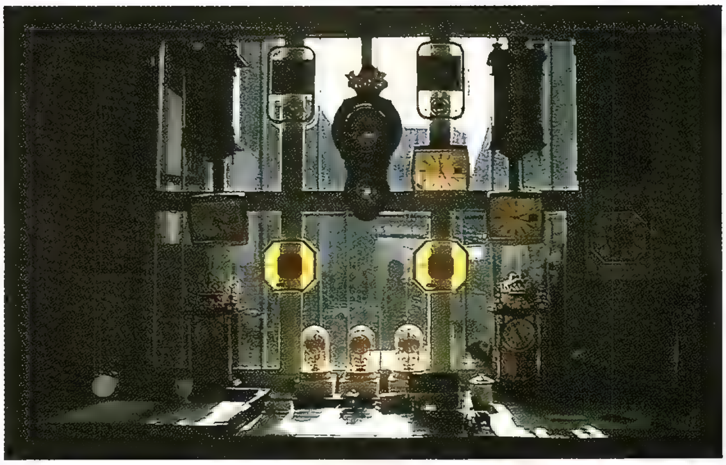
3

There were no speeding vehicles to be seen, just plodding donkey carts and locals on bicycles, which certainly added to the general tranquillity.

The busiest street is straddled by the three-storey Bell Tower, the tallest building in town. The shops along it, though kept in good repair, are old-fashioned, with red columns flanking the main entrance and windows latticed in designs of utter simplicity. There was a satisfactory range of goods on offer, mainly local products and daily necessities, so that it seemed the residents could obtain most of what they needed without going out of town.

At this point I heard what sounded like the music traditionally played at a wedding and saw a procession heading towards me led by elderly men with colourful ceremonial banners whose sad faces made it plain that it was nothing of the sort.

Behind them came a sedan chair bearing the 'double happiness' symbol, just like at a wedding, followed by a coffin draped in a beautifully embroidered black cloth carried by eight pallbearers. There were people in a horse-drawn carriage who seemed to be relatives, their faces concealed beneath white veils and some weeping, though their grief was in general admirably restrained.



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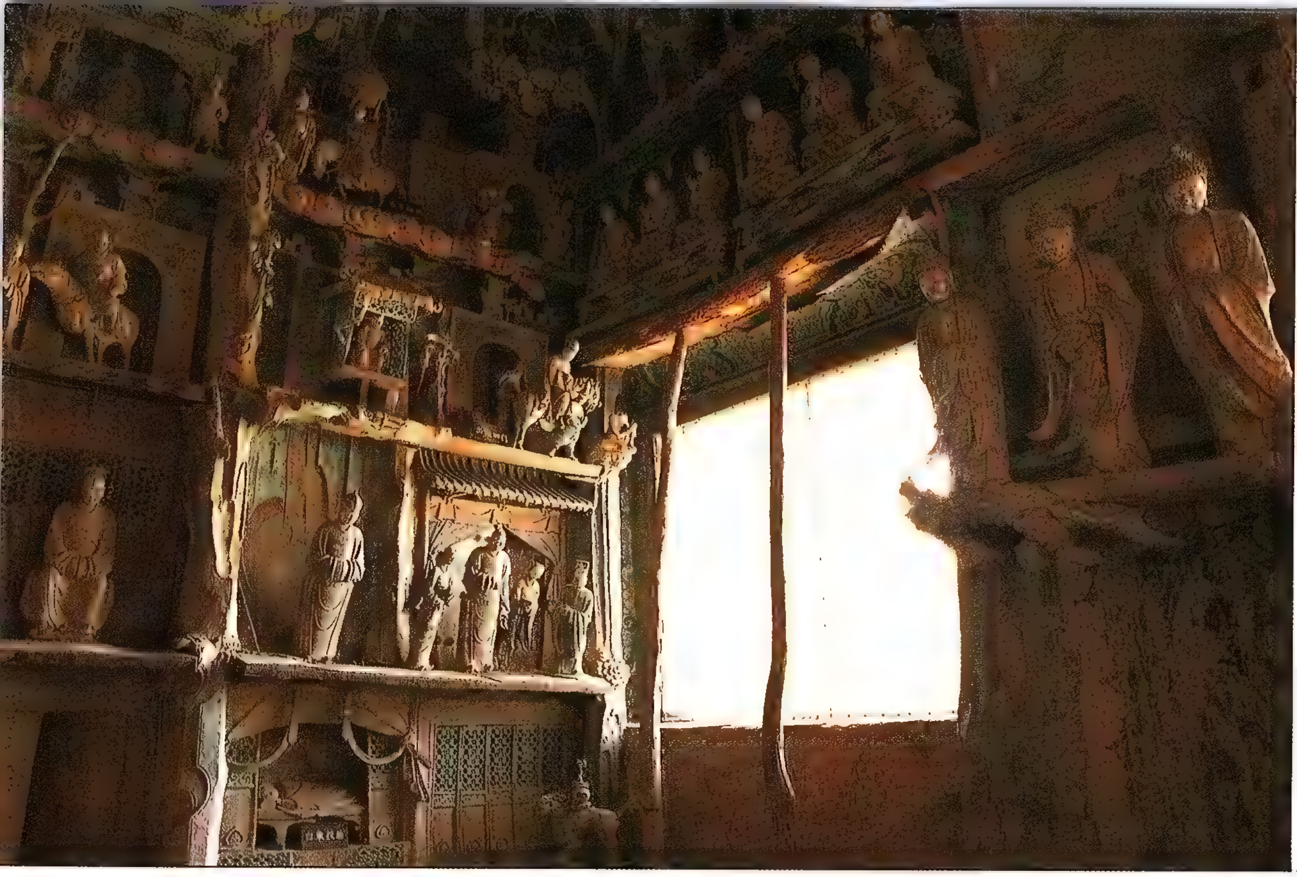
In the shadow of the walls a funeral party, preceded by men armed with ceremonial banners (3), strikes a sombre note (1, 2). True to style, one of the old shops offers antique clocks (4).



1

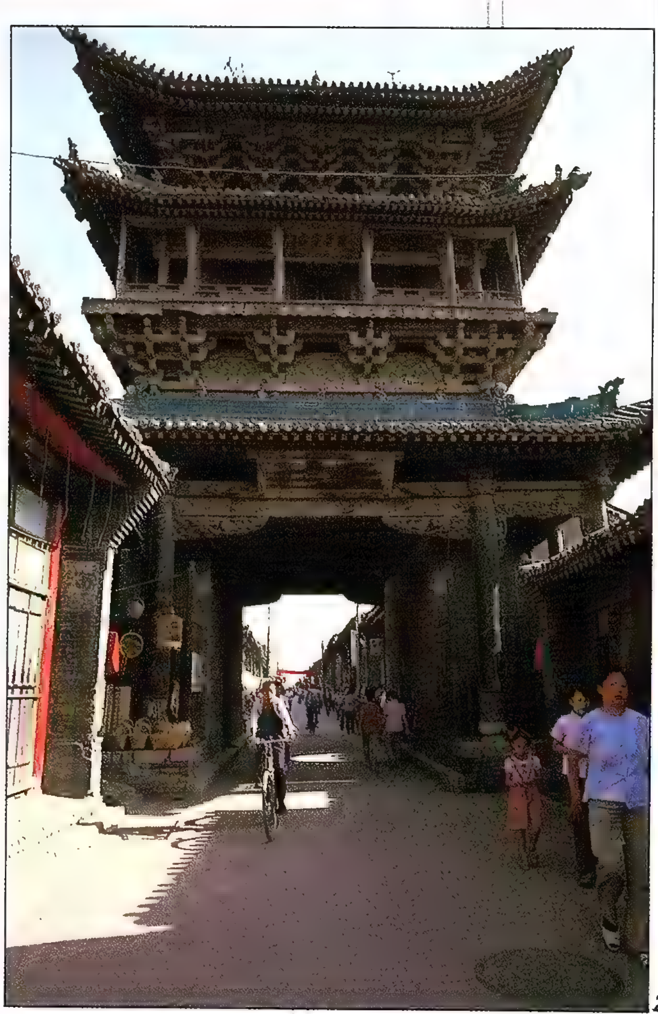
Important Temple Sites

After a thorough tour of the town, I visited Shuanglin Temple, seven kilometres to the west. The temple was founded in 571 during the Northern Qi dynasty, though it was rebuilt several times under the Ming, from which period the present fabric and statuary date. There are ten halls in the front, middle and back courts. It was very quiet, and the afternoon sun cast weak shafts of light through the window paper, illuminating the dancing motes of dust. Small as it is and pitifully neglected for years, the temple has over two thousand painted Buddha statues, all in graceful poses. Particularly lifelike are those depicting donors modelled on local people of the past.

As it was already after three by my watch, I hurried on to Zhenguo Temple, fifteen kilometres northeast of the town, founded in 963 under the Northern Han (947-950), one of the Five Dynasties. Of its thirteen halls, only the Thousand Buddha Hall survives from that period. I lingered there for some time until the sun began to sink. As I passed out of the gate and looked back, the glazed tiles seemed to be tinged with gold. In and around this ancient town, even the sunset is imbued with a sense of classical poetry.

Translated by Wu Ling

At Shuanglin Temple, a series of clay figurines retraces a story from the life of Sakyamuni (1). The Bell Tower (2) adds to the atmosphere of the past.



2

Fantasies in Jade

PHOTOS BY MA YAOJUN
TEXT BY QING YUAN

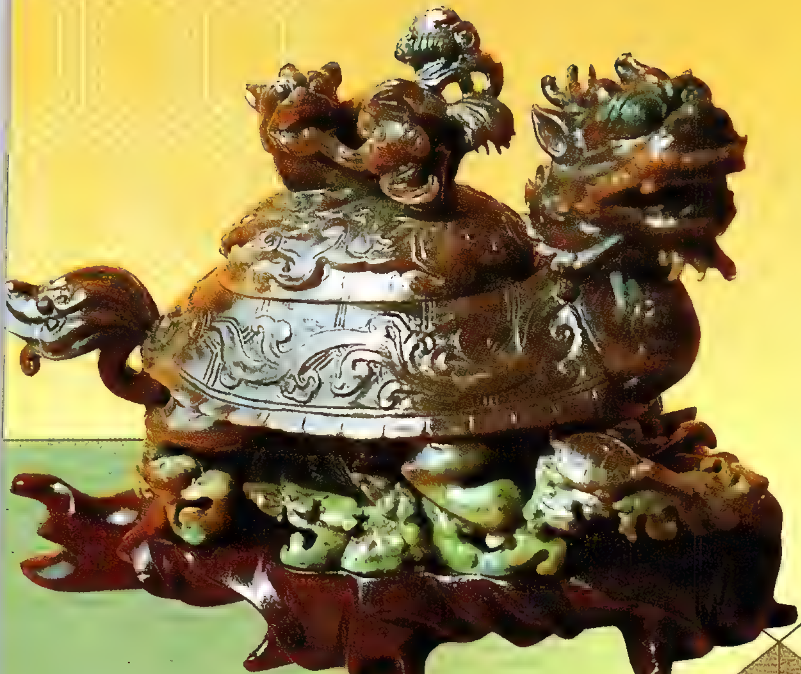
Yangzhou, Jiangsu's ancient cultural city north of the River Yangtse — once home to scholars, poets and painters — is renowned for its lacquerware, papercuts, embroidery and potted miniature trees. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, the city also achieved fame as a centre for jade ornaments. Among the collections of the Palace Museum in Beijing's Forbidden City there is a huge jade carving which depicts Yu the Great, one of China's legendary rulers, attempting to tame the turbulent waters of the Huanghe (Yellow River). Produced in the Qing dynasty, this is an intricate work full of vivid detail, characteristic of Yangzhou's jade-carving style.

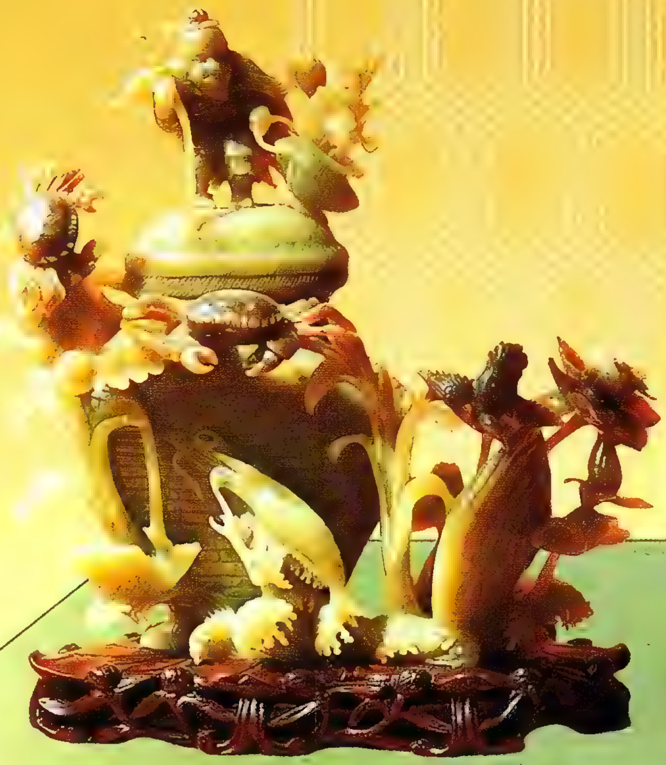
Popular themes still produced in jade today, two of which are shown here, include figures, plants, landscapes, incense burners, vases and bowls.

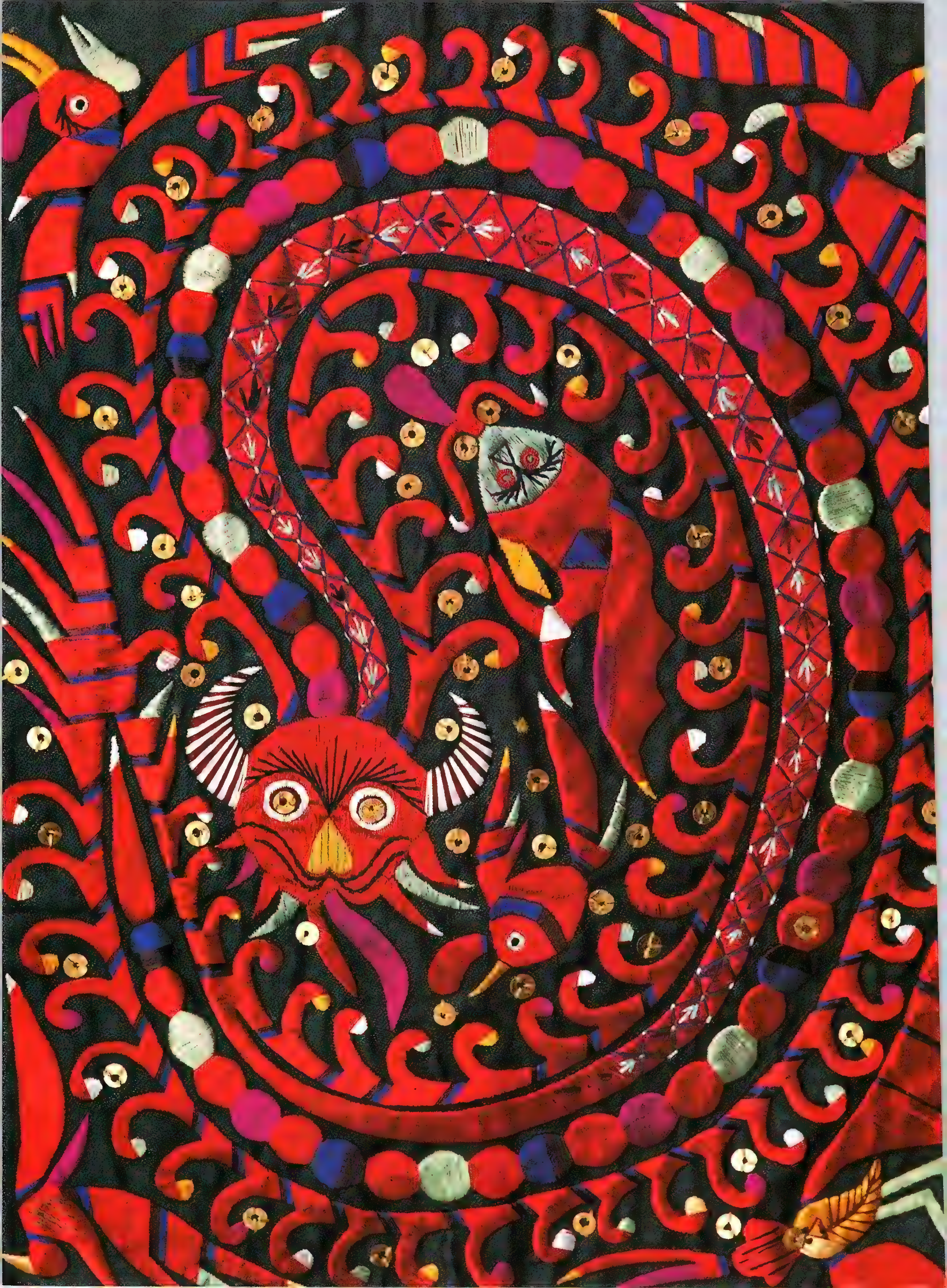
The ornament on the left, of Henan jade, consists of a mystical creature with a dragon's head and the body of a tortoise. Treading sundry marine creatures underfoot, it is obviously an important figure in the world of the sea. The wave-like patterns on its shell denote that it is moving through water.

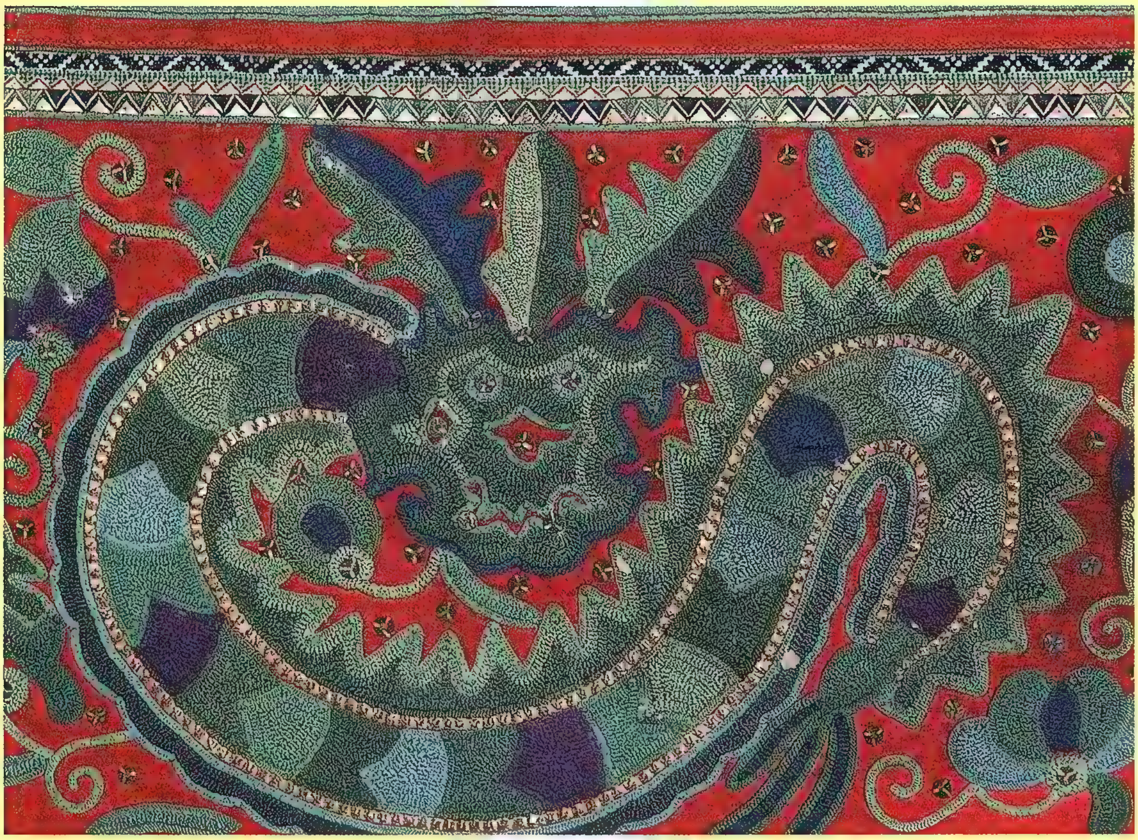
The jade carving on the right illustrates a famous Chinese proverb. A snipe and a giant clam are locked in mortal combat and, thus occupied, fall easy prey to a fisherman. The moral? It is the third party that benefits from any dispute!

Translated by M.K.









DRAGONS in Miao Embroidery

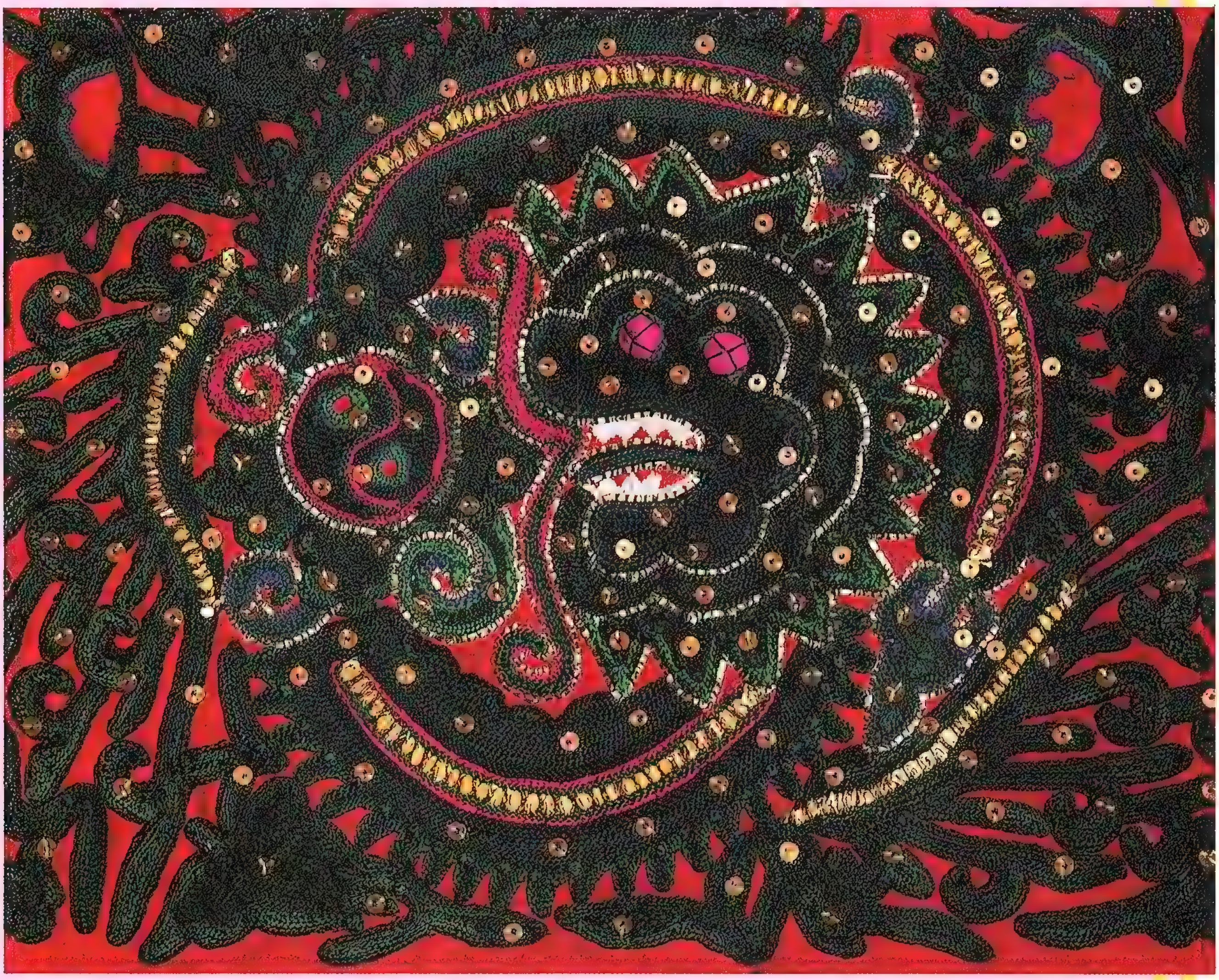
PHOTOS BY ZENG XIANYANG

ARTICLE BY CHEN XUNMING

Dragons in Chinese legend are omnipotent. They can undergo multifarious changes, summoning thunder and rain, diving deep into the sea or soaring among the clouds.

Revered by the imperial court, the dragon eventually became the symbol of China. The earliest mythical ancestors of the Chinese, Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor), Fuxi, Nüwa and Chiyou, are sometimes said to have taken the form of dragons. But, according to the Miao, both the dragon and man's earliest ancestor hatched from butterfly eggs, so they are brothers.

China's nationalities differ in their legends about the dragon. The Hans regard it as the symbol of power, giving it a hallowed and dignified appearance, while the Miao people connect it more with their daily lives, so that it is generally shown as kind and lovable. In fact, when I was in a Miao area in the south of Guizhou Province recently, I noticed that almost every village had a pool symbolizing the dragon's home and that the houses and bridges were decorated with dragon motifs, while dragons adorned sleeves and shoulders of the local dress.



Gorgeous Embroidered Dragons

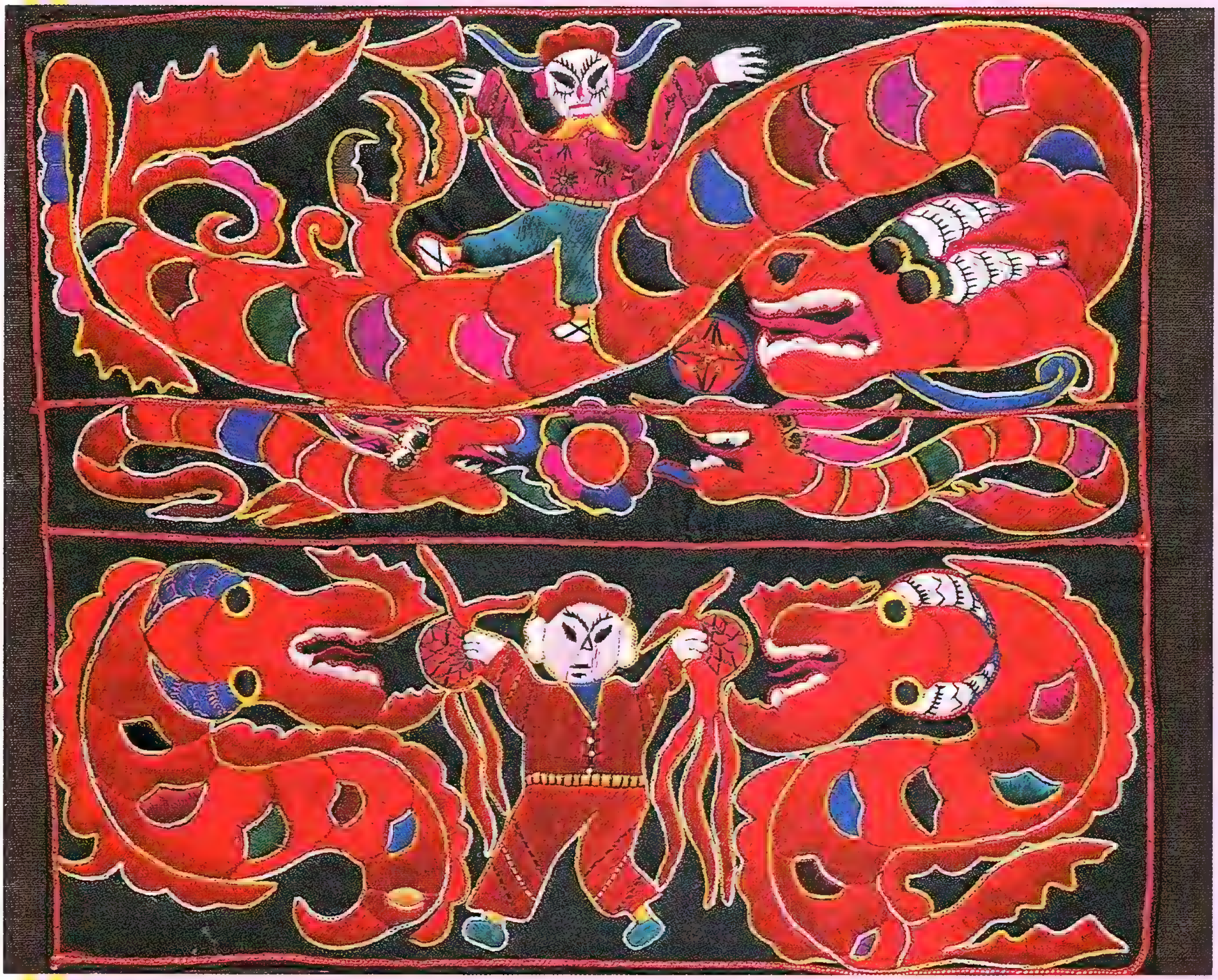
Of all the minority peoples of China, the Miao are reckoned to be best at depicting the diversity of forms and the brilliant colours of the dragon in designs which have been handed down in their embroidery traditions since ancient times. Some designs consist of a single, imperious dragon, others depict a couple of dragons playing together innocently.

The style of such a piece of embroidery may be meticulous, endeavouring to show details of the dragon's appearance (although of course nobody has ever seen one!) or abstract, with geometrical designs suggesting the dragon's nature. Some embroideries are distinguished by their rustic charm, others by their fine work and elegant simplicity. As regards the actual shape and composition of the dragon, the imagination of the individual needlewoman comes into play here so that, for example, we may find a dragon which has both its vivid eyes set on one side of its head.

As for the context, most Miao embroidery is based on the theme of the supernatural dragon consorting quite naturally with human beings, birds and aquatic creatures, thus breaking down the limitations of species, time and space.

A Background of Legend

However, the originality of the dragon in Miao embroidery is not the only difference from dragon traditions elsewhere. It is coloured by many aspects of Miao life and legend. Thus the herdsman has his 'goat-dragon', the farmer his



'ox-dragon', while the mystical, serpentine 'snake-dragon' and the sleek, golden-scaled 'fish-dragon' are purely creatures of the imagination. In Miao creation stories, the foe which bit and wounded Jiangyang, the earliest ancestor of the Miao, is said to have been a centipede, but in Miao embroidery its ugly, horrific body takes on something of the dragon's grandeur.

In some designs humans play with a dragon, the unaffected human figures and gentle dragon evoking the open-heartedness and warmth of childhood. In the Miao legend, Jiangyang and the dragon are brothers, so it is not surprising that they should get along so well. These themes also reveal the kinship which the Miao feel towards the dragon.

Common motifs in Miao embroidery include the mythical *jiwei* bird, the firefly and the bee, in addition to humans, dragons and their joint mother, the butterfly. Having laid her twelve eggs, the butterfly, it is said, asked the *jiwei* bird to hatch them for her. After many years, the eggs finally cracked to produce man, the Thunder God, the dragon, the tiger, the snake and sundry other creatures. The firefly and the bee merit special mention because it is the firefly which lights up the night for the dragon, and it was the bee which taught Jiangyang, the Miao's ancestor, to dance.

Miao embroidery often has a mystical dimension to it, maybe because it is based to such an extent on romance and legend, giving us a glimpse into an ancient and magical world.

Translated by Wu Ling

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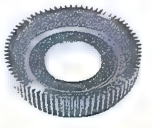

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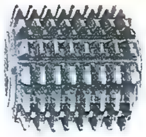

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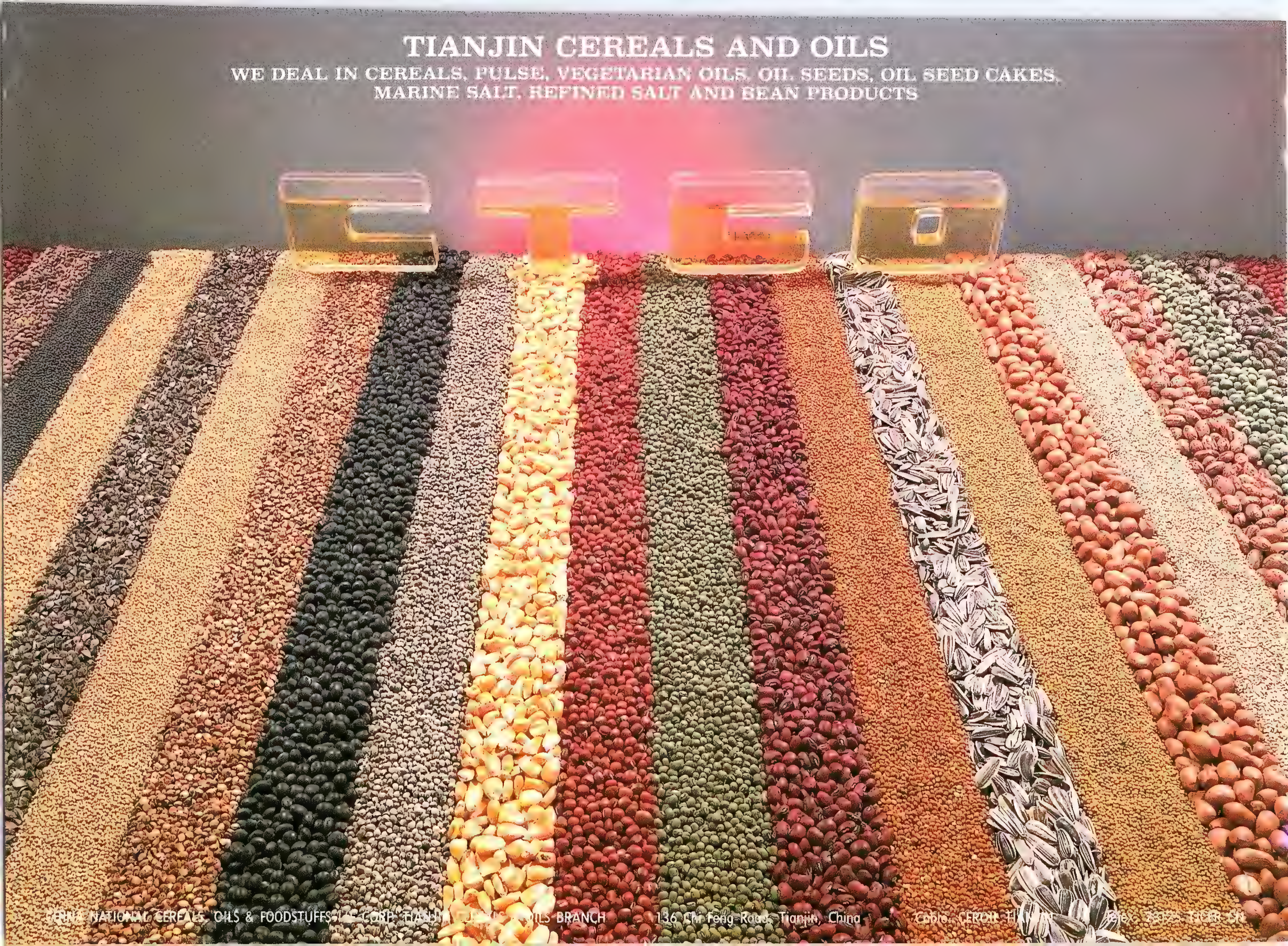

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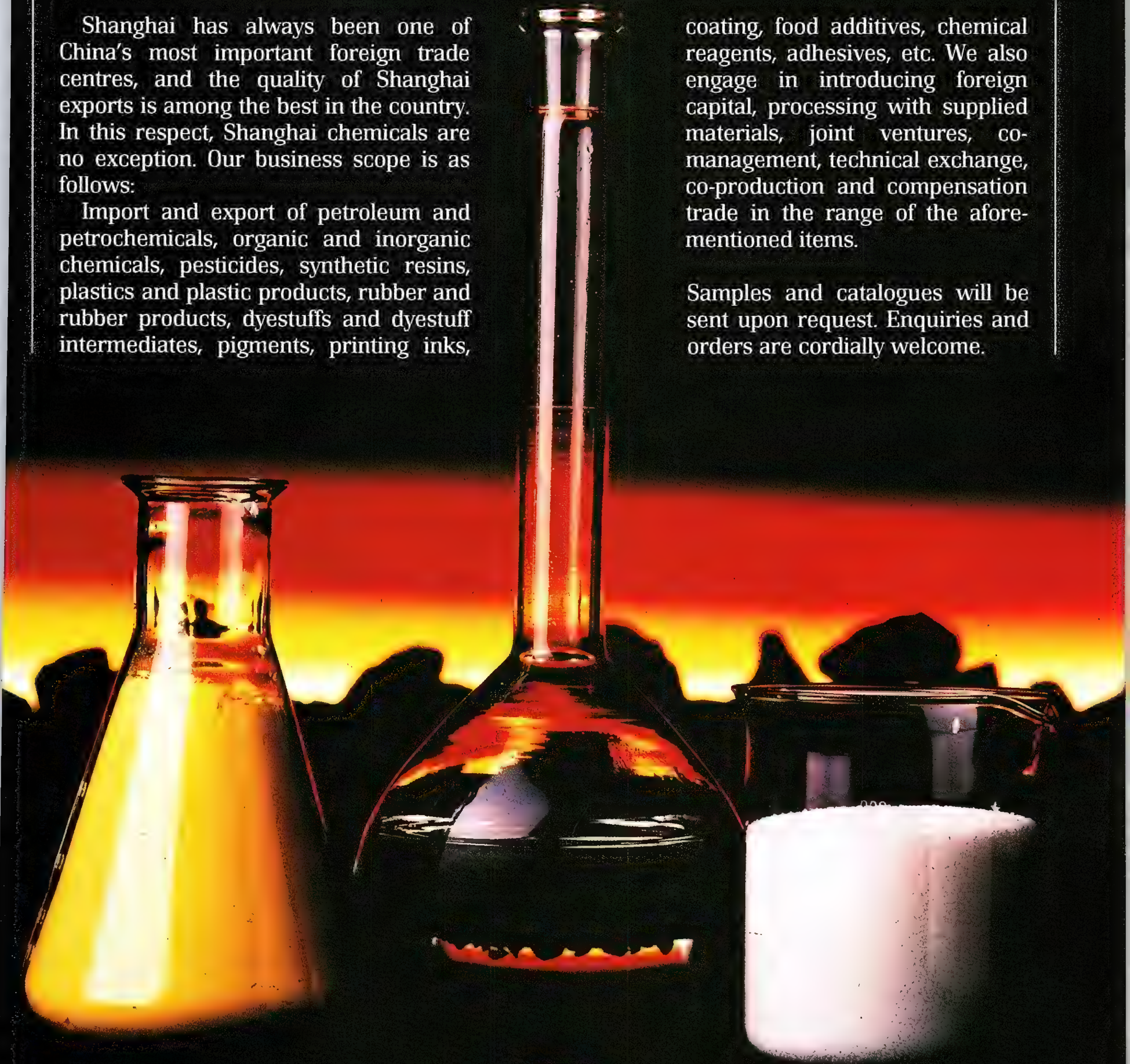

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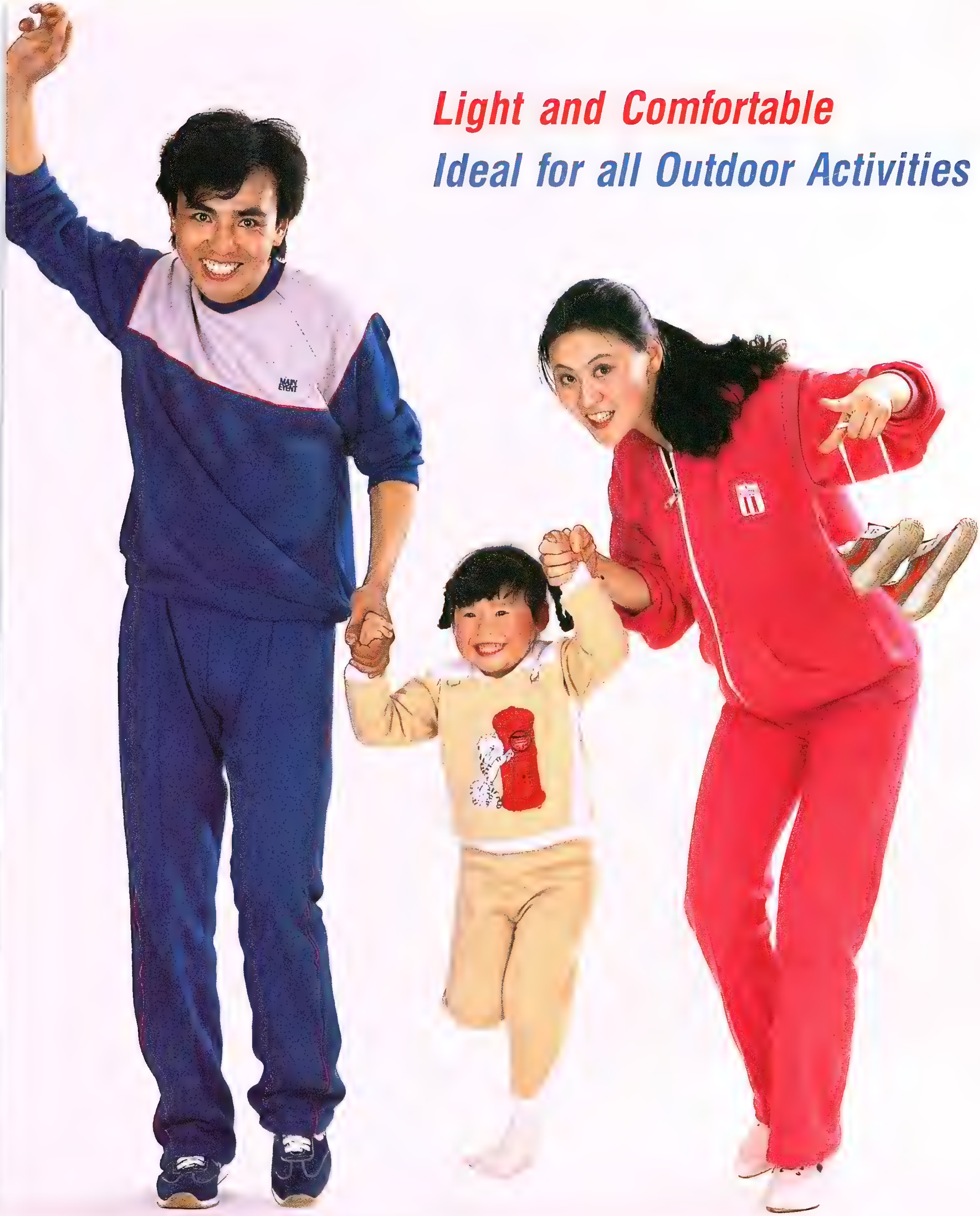
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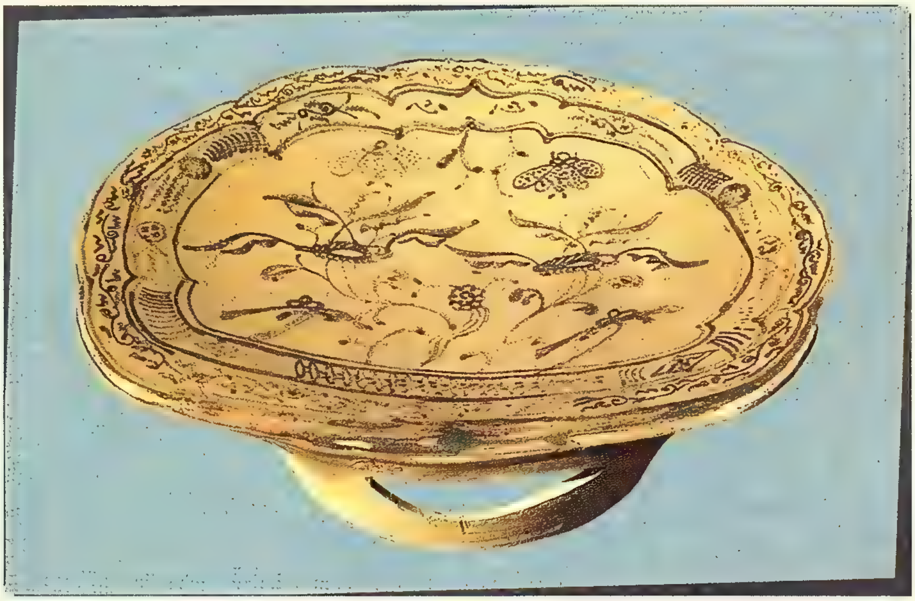
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Ceramic Headrests

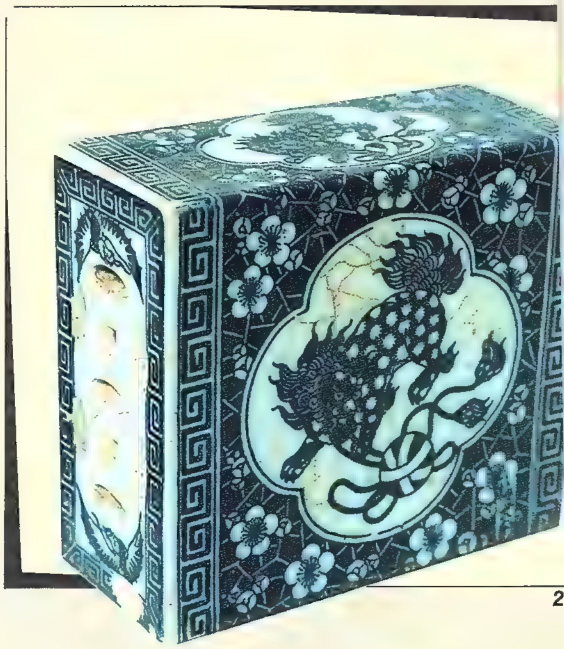
TEXT BY SONG NIAN

The Chinese ceramic headrest was designed to keep a sleeper cool in the heat of summer, but it can also be appreciated purely as an *objet d'art*.

The advantages of this type of pottery 'pillow' have been known for well over a thousand years. Examples 1, 2 and 5 are antique painted headrests dating from the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties which were unearthed from a site on the Leizhou Peninsula in south-western Guangdong Province. But such articles were by no means restricted to the steamy south; example 6 shown here comes from Jiangsu Province, while the other two were found in Wuwei in the Gansu Corridor, far to the northwest.

Ceramic headrests were made in a variety of shapes both plain and fancy: square, rectangular, wedge-shaped, saddle-shaped.... Some are patterned on the head of a *ruyi* (an S-shaped ornamental sceptre with a head resembling a cloud, usually made of jade, which embodied wishes for good luck and marital bliss); some may even be in the shape of a child or servant. They may be painted with motifs of flowers, animals, human figures or auspicious elements, or be inscribed with poems or other calligraphy.

These 'pillows', hard though they may seem to us nowadays, were intended for practical use. Whatever their shape, there was always a concave surface to hold the head. The hollowed-out centre of some of the square ones incorporated a drawer for storing small items of value. The ends or the upper surface usually featured openwork for both decoration and ventilation.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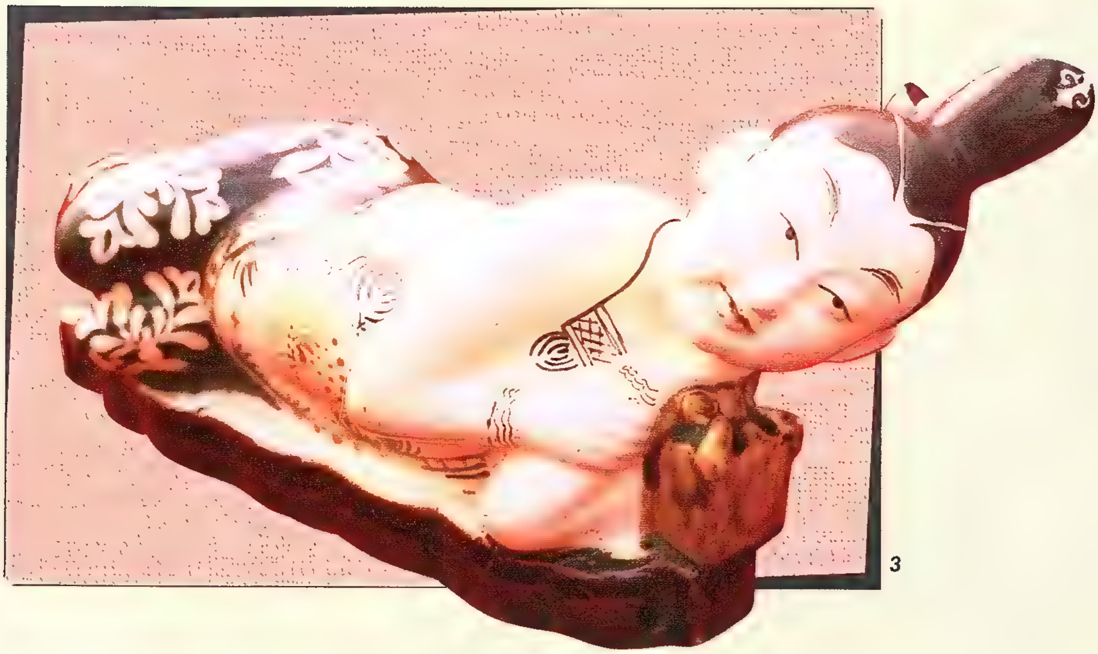
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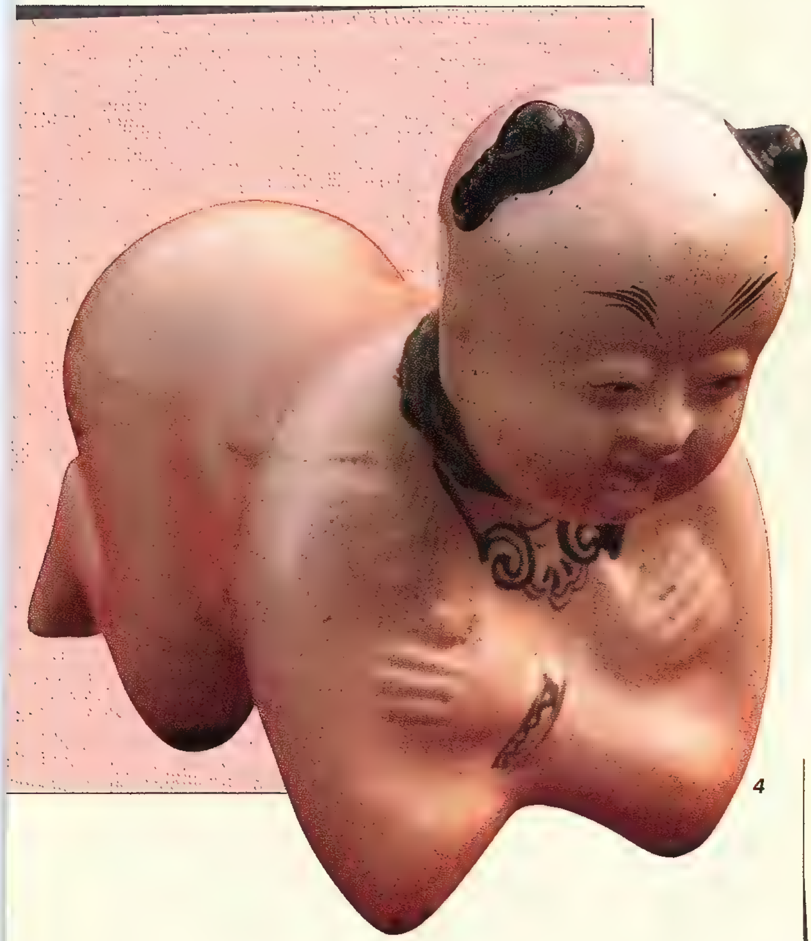
1 Modelled on the head of a *ruyi,* this headrest is more stable than it looks at first sight. It is delicately painted with birds, butterflies and foliage, and appears to be unglazed.

(Photo by Ma Yaojun)



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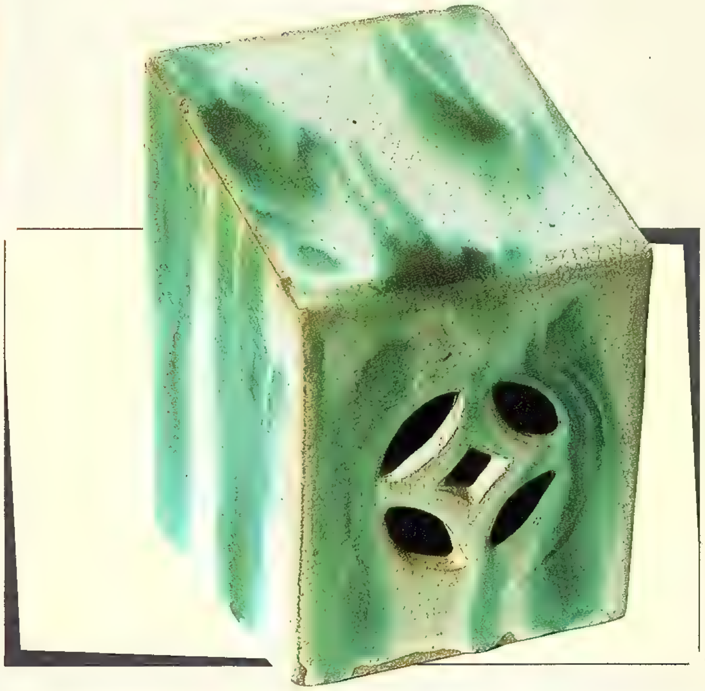
5 This wedge-shaped headrest is simply but effectively decorated with openwork resembling an ancient Chinese coin (often worn or carried as an amulet to avert evil). The glaze displays the extraordinarily 'modern' variegated splashes often seen on Song work. *(Photo by Ma Yaojun)*

6 A Song-dynasty white porcelain 'grandson' headrest excavated in Jiangsu. The child's head rests on an ingot of silver or gold called *yuanbao*, and the sheltering lotus leaf forms the headrest. Lotus (*lian*) often symbolizes love (*lian*), and a child with a lotus bears the message 'May the gods send you a son'. *(Photo by Mao Mingqing)*



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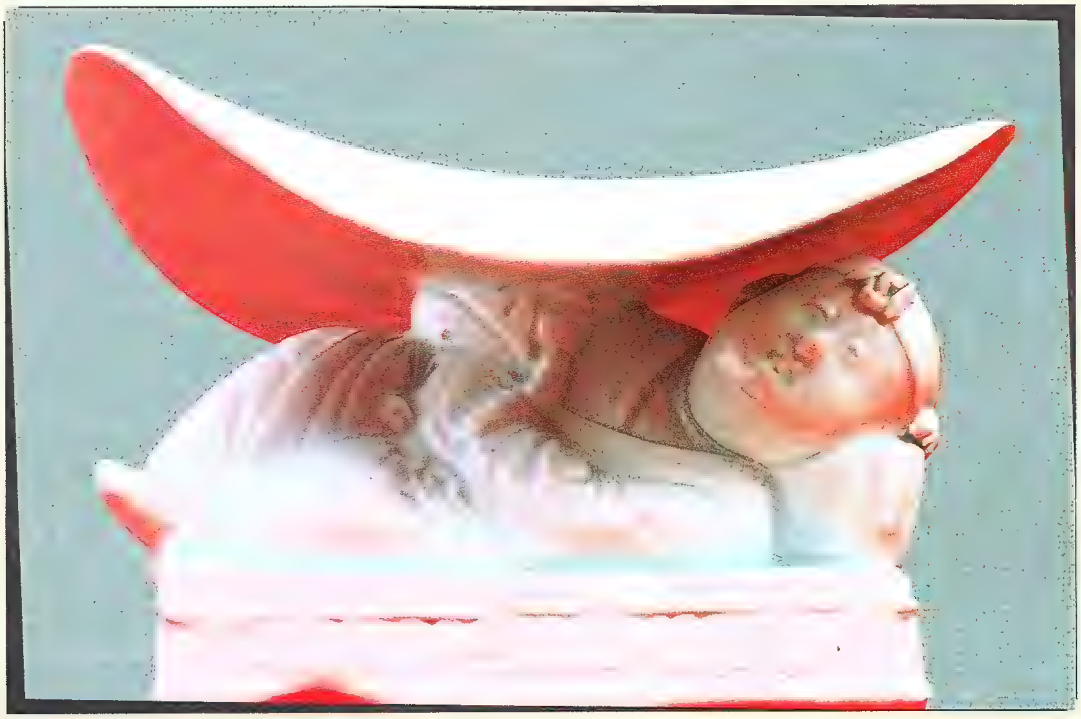
2 A lion playing with a ball, surrounded by plum blossom, forms the central motif. Bats (*bian fu:* bats are often used to symbolize good fortune — *fu*) decorate both ends. *(Photo by Ma Yaojun)*

3 A semi-nude beauty to accompany one's slumbers! The concept of this Qing-dynasty (1644-1911) headrest appears as much humorous as bold. This example was excavated in Wuwei, Gansu. *(Photo by Wang Shengli)*

4 A Yuan-dynasty porcelain pillow, the curve of the child's back forming the actual headrest. This may be the portrait of a young immortal of extraordinary strength. A child is generally a symbol or wish for prolific progeny (as in that part of the traditional wedding ceremony where a young boy was made to roll all over the nuptial bed). *(Photo by Wang Shengli)*



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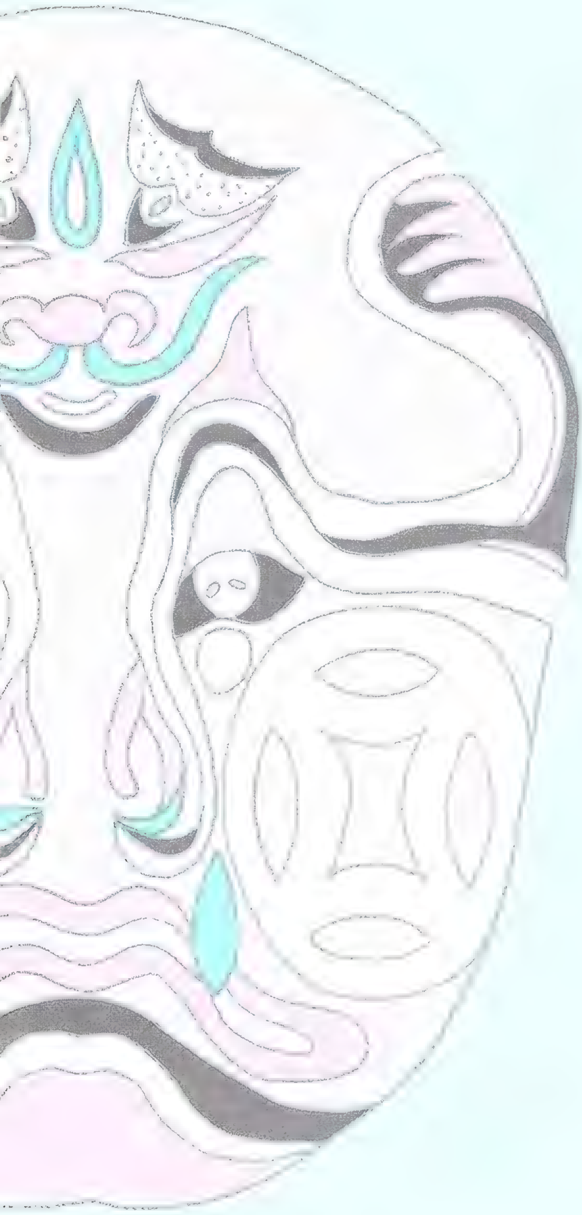


FIFTY YEARS ON STAGE

The subject of this interview, Fang Rongxiang, is one of the most prominent figures in Beijing opera, the best-known and most representative of traditional Chinese dramatic art forms. He specializes in playing *jing* ('painted face' or *hua lian*) characters for which the actor is required to paint his face in an extensive and stylized manner. These are male roles of strong personality, usually kings, generals, demons, heroes or adventurers.

The 63-year-old Fang started learning Beijing opera when he was eight in order to earn his living. After studying under several well-known masters, at the age of sixteen he became the student of the then famous *jing* actor Qiu Shengrong (1915-1971). Qiu was known for his rich and expressive voice and lively rhythm. His style came to be known as the Qiu School, and its best exponent after himself was in fact Fang.

A native of Beijing, Fang joined an army troupe which toured the northeast. In 1958 the troupe was incorporated into the Shandong Troupe, of which he is still a member. Some of his more famous roles occur in the operas *The General and the Minister are Reconciled* and *Cutting up the Judge*.

In 1985 Fang had a myocardial infarction but miraculously recovered after an operation and is now able to perform with as much energy as before.

He was so kind as to share with CHINA TOURISM (CT) some of the ups and downs of a life devoted to the stage.

CT: **Which period of the learnin process did you consider th most difficult?**

Fang: We first had to exercise our wais and legs and learn to do somersaults and so on. The teache would coach us closely and i somebody wasn't doing too well he would flog his legs with a rattan cane. Sometimes it hurt s much that I couldn't sit dow afterwards. When we practise singing or reciting, the teache would poke a hard piece of woo into our mouths if we didn't pronounce words clearly or if we forgot them. And we would have to keep singing even if ou mouths were bleeding. This was of course very harsh for children However, even though we were small, we knew that we were doing this to make a living, and tha the teacher just wanted us to d it right. So we didn't complain.

For me, those days were no too hard. My most difficult time came when I went to study with Qiu Shengrong. Before, I was taught a more conventional approach, a clearer and simpler way of singing, reciting and moving around. But Master Qiu paid more attention to details and employed a subtle 'inner breath' in vocal work. I had to forget what I'd already learnt and start all over again. It was very difficult. Besides, Master Qiu was himself an actor and had to perform, so he was unable to spend much time coaching us. His most effective method was therefore to take us to the theatre to see him rehearse. But how much one could pick up in this way depended greatly on the individual.

CT: **When did you make your stage debut?**

Fang: When I was twelve. I did all sorts of roles: *lao dan* (old woman), *lao sheng* (old man), *wu sheng* (warrior), etc. But after six months my teacher suggested that I'd better concentrate on playing *jing* male roles. As an actor or actress ages, he or she becomes less suited to playing most of the roles except for the *jing* roles (although women rarely play such characters). So I worked harder on those.

There is no definite period for a child to learn an opera before he can perform it. It depends completely on his talents. Some people can sing an episode after hearing it only a few times. A fast learner can sometimes perform minor roles after only two or three years.

T: **You said you first started to study opera to earn your living. Do you make a good living?**

ang: My parents sent me to learn opera because they were poor and the teacher provided students with all their meals. There were also bonuses when there were performances.

My monthly salary thirty years ago was the equivalent of over 200 yuan. I'm still getting that now, but it's enough for me to live on, given our present living standards. Most Beijing opera artistes now earn about 80 yuan per month, about the same as most other performers.

T: **How long is a performer's stage life usually?**

ang: Well, it depends on the diligence and health of the particular person. Even if one is getting on in years, one can still continue as long as one's health and memory remain good, and as long as one keeps practising singing and movement. I know an actor who is over eighty years old, but he still practises and goes on stage.

I've never thought of retiring. I will go on performing as long as my body permits.

CT: **You must have had lots of unforgettable experiences?**

Fang: Countless! One of the more recent ones was in 1985 when I was backstage, about to give my first performance after my heart operation. My heartbeat rose to more than 180. Everyone asked me not to go on. But I believed that the audience was most enthusiastic and eager to see me perform again and I didn't like to disappoint them so I just went ahead. Strangely my heartbeat slowed down after my performance.

Back in China I often perform in villages or factories. Once I visited a textile factory. The women workers, though young, had heard about me and begged me to sing a few episodes. But the machinery in operation there was deafening, so they said, 'Sing into our ears.' So I took turns singing a few lines into each worker's ear. And they were so happy!

CT: **Has your devotion to the stage affected your daily life?**

Fang: To some extent. But it can be quite amusing. I have this habit of silently reciting the lyrics while walking along. Once on the street in Beijing, I was so lost in my recitation that I bumped my head — quite hard — against a telegraph pole. I can't help memorizing my lyrics like this even when my wife is with me. Sometimes she gets mad and walks away to the other side of the street, and I don't even notice!

My art has had a great influence on my family. I have six children who are all interested in opera, and three of them are now Beijing opera actors.

CT: **How do you spend your spare time when you are not rehearsing?**

Fang: Like all other Beijing opera artistes, I enjoy nothing better than listening to songs and watching dance performances, both classical and modern ones. We can benefit greatly from studying other kinds of performing arts.

CT: **I've heard that the opera world has some taboos, especially backstage.**

Fang: Yes, it's true. For example, performers must stick to rehearsing or memorizing their parts and not say anything that's nonsense while they're backstage. Nobody should utter the word *san,* which means to fall apart. As a consequence an umbrella, which has the same sound in Chinese, cannot be mentioned. Actresses cannot just sit anywhere they like and definitely not on chests which contain costumes as that would bring bad luck to the troupe. Every performer has his or her own seat backstage except for the *chou,* the clown roles, who can sit anywhere they like.

But most of these taboos date from the old days. They are less and less common in China nowadays.

CT: **Is there any danger of a shortage of successors?**

Fang: Well, basically, good performers are always hard to come by. There is an old saying: 'Not even every ten years can there be a fine actor.' It is not easy to find and successfully train opera artistes who have a fine voice, pleasing physical proportions *and* elegant movements. Fortunately the art is still being passed on at present. A considerable number of young people, including high school and secondary school students, have written to us expressing a desire to study opera. I myself have over twenty students scattered throughout China and I'm very happy that three of them won top awards at the Beijing Opera Youth Show last year.

It is of course our responsibility to train successors. In recent years I've tried to edit librettos of the Qiu School version of opera, some of them during the time spent on my sickbed in 1985. I hope more and more people will be able to carry on singing.

CT: **What is the future of opera in China?**

Fang: For the moment there are over two thousand troupes in the country. But their success will depend on whether the artistes work hard enough and if they coordinate well as a company.

I believe opera has a promising future as I've noticed — I always take the trouble to do so during my performances — that young people figure quite prominently among the audience. In March this year when we gave three performances to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the venerable Yuan Shihai's stage career, all the tickets sold out in a single morning, which proves that Beijing opera is still very popular. The question is: will we have artistes in future good enough to live up to this fine traditional art?

Translated by M.K.

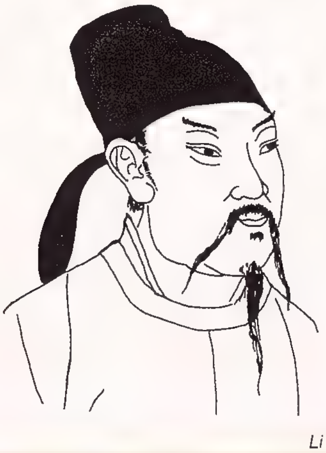
Interview conducted by Li Wo Tak

Of Dangers and Delays

The exertions (deliberately chosen or otherwise) of travel in China appear to be this month's dominant theme. Just to demonstrate that the hazards of modern travel in this vast land are nothing compared to those faced as a matter of routine by travellers in the past, we present here a poem and an excerpt from a novel dating from very different periods.

The brilliant Tang-dynasty poet Li Bai (701-762) was himself widely travelled. Born in Tokmak near Lake Balkash in what is now Soviet Central Asia, he was taken back to Sichuan when he was five and grew up there. But, owing to his extensive wanderings, he came to consider the whole of China his home. His poems (of which he is thought to have written around twenty thousand) and their diversity of themes reflect his wide-ranging and fiercely individualistic spirit as well as his experiences on the road. This poem, *The Sichuan Road,* is taken from the volume *Poetry and Prose of the Tang and Song*.

The excerpt comes from the ninth chapter of *The Travels of Lao Can,* a barely disguised autobiographical novel written by Liu E (1857-1909). Born into a Jiangsu family which was early on exposed to Western influence, Liu E was both brilliant and eccentric. Among his major achievements were flood conservancy work on the Yellow River, the opening of a Shanxi iron mine, and the discovery of the significance of Shang-dynasty oracle bones — interests which took him all over the country. However, his unconventional and at times high-handed ways gained him enemies in high places and he was exiled in 1908 to Xinjiang, where he died a year later. Written in 1905, this novel is tinged with melancholy, an expression of the author's disappointment with the effete and decadent Qing dynasty.



Li Bai

The Sichuan Road

What heights!
It is easier to climb to Heaven
Than take the Sichuan Road.

Long ago Can Cong and Yu Fu founded the kingdom of Shu;
Forty-eight thousand years went by,
Yet no road linked it with the land of Qin.[1]
Westward from Taibai Mountain a bird track
Wandered to the summit of Mount Emei,
But not until brave men had perished in the great landslide
Were bridges hooked together in the air
And a path hacked through the rocks.
Above, high peaks turn back the sun's chariot drawn by six dragons;
Below, the charging waves are caught in whirlpools;
Not even yellow cranes dare fly this way,
Monkeys cannot leap those gorges.
At Green Mud Ridge the path winds back and forth,
With nine twists for every hundred steps.
Touching the stars, the traveller looks up and gasps.
Then sinks down, clutching his heart, to groan aloud.

Friend, when will you return from this westward journey?
This is a fearful way. You cannot cross these cliffs.
The only living things are birds crying in ancient trees,
Male wooing female up and down the woods,
And the cuckoo, weary of empty hills,
Singing to the moon.
It is easier to climb to Heaven
Than take the Sichuan Road.
The mere telling of its perils blanches youthful cheeks.
Peak follows peak, each but a hand's breadth from the sky;
Dead pine trees hang head down into the chasms,
Torrents and waterfalls outroar each other,
Pounding the cliffs and boiling over rocks,
Booming like thunder through a thousand caverns.
What takes you, traveller, this long, weary way
So filled with danger?
Sword Pass is steep and narrow,
One man could hold this pass against ten thousand;
And sometimes its defenders
Are not mortal men but wolves and jackals.
By day we dread the savage tiger, by night the serpent,
Sharp-fanged sucker of blood
Who chops men down like stalks of hemp.

The City of Brocade[2] *may be a pleasant place,*
But it is best to seek your home.
For it is easier to climb to Heaven
Than take the Sichuan Road.
I gaze into the west, and sigh.

---

[1] Shu, the old name for western Sichuan, was conquered by the kingdom of Qin in 316 B.C.
[2] A name for Chengdu, the capital of Shu.

An excerpt from The Travels of Lao Can

It is said that when Lao Can left Dongchang istrict, he intended to return to the provincial apital. One day he reached Qihe District and ooked for a hotel at the South Gate, only to find hat all the hotels on the street were full. He felt urprised and said to himself, "This place has ever been so busy before. What can be the reason or this?"

He was wondering about this when a man ntered the hotel, shouting, "Good! Good! It is early all through. Probably tomorrow morning we an cross over."

Lao Can had no time to question him, but he ound the hotel manager and asked him, "Do you have any rooms?"

"We are full," replied the manager. "Please try nother hotel."

"I have been to two hotels already," said Lao Can, "and they were both full. Try to squeeze me nto a room; it doesn't matter whether it is good or bad."

"This place is really full up," said the manager, "but in the next hotel on the east side some guests eft at noon, and if you go there quickly you may still find a room."

Lao Can accordingly went to the other hotel and asked for the manager, and there were indeed two rooms empty, so he moved his baggage in. The attendant came running to pour him water to wash his face, and put a lighted incense-stick on the table, saying, "Please smoke."

"Why is the place in such a hubbub," asked Lao Can, "so that all the hotels are full?"

"The north wind has been blowing for several days," replied the attendant, "and for the last three days there has been ice floating in the river, some blocks as big as houses; so that boats dare not pass, fearing to be wrecked on the icebergs. Already yesterday the upper river was completely blocked up with ice; below this bay boats could pass, but then they would be frozen up by the ice on both sides of the river. Yesterday His Excellency Mr. Li of Dongchang District came here on his way to see the provincial governor; but having reached here he could not cross the river, and became very anxious; so he stayed in the yamen and asked the local boatmen and headmen to break the ice. They have been breaking it all day, and it seems they are breaking through. Only they can't stop tonight, for once they leave off it will freeze up again. Our hotel was still full this morning, but we had a group of guests among whom was an old man, who looked at the river for a long time from the bank and said, 'They will never break through this ice; there is no point waiting here. Let's go to Luokou to see whether there is any other way or not. We can come to a decision there.' They only left at noon, luckily for you, for otherwise you would not have got a room." After saying this he went out.

Lao Can washed his face, made his bed, locked his room and went out to the riverside to have a look. He saw the Yellow River running down from the southwest to form a bay here, before flowing due east. The river here was not very wide, the distance between the banks being little more than half a mile, while the river itself was only some three hundred yards across; but the ice was piling up some seven or eight inches above the water. Then he walked some two hundred steps upstream and saw the floating ice from upstream floating down piece by piece. When it reached the bay here its passage was blocked by the ice in front, and, being unable to move forward, it stuck fast. Then the ice behind pressed forward, crushing against it with a grating sound, and this ice was impelled by the current to thrust its way by degrees to the top of the ice in front, so that the latter was gradually pressed down. Although the river was about three hundred yards across, the rapid current in the middle was only some hundred yards wide, and the water on the two sides was already frozen over, presenting a flat surface; thus, covered by the wind-blown dust, it looked like a sandy beach. But the rapid current in the middle kept rushing forward with a great uproar, forcing the ice which could not sweep past to leap sidewise. The ice on the smooth water, crushed by the ice hurtling from midstream, fled precipitately to the shore where it was thrown up for a matter of two yards, and many pieces of broken ice were forced erect under the pressure, standing upright like so many small screens. Lao Can watched this for about an hour until the ice was locked so fast that it could not budge.

Lao Can then walked further downstream, passing the place where he had stopped before and continuing further. He saw two boats with about a dozen men on board, all of whom were breaking the ice with great wooden pestles, pounding the ice before and then behind, while by the other bank there were two other boats similarly engaged. The day was growing dark and he decided to go back to his hotel, and then he noticed that the willow trees on the bank were already casting shadows on the ground and trembling in the wind, for by this time the moon had risen. He returned to the hotel, opened his door, called the attendant to light his lamp, had his dinner and went out for another stroll on the bank.

By this time the wind had dropped, but the frosty air stung even more sharply than the wind; however Lao Can had fortunately already put on the sheepskin coat given him by Mr. Shen, so that he could stand this bitter cold. He saw that the boats were still breaking the ice. On each boat there was a small lantern, and from the distance he seemed to see written on one *The Yamen,* and on the other, *Qihe District,* but he did not give them another thought.

He raised his head to look at the mountain in the south, glistening white and appearing even more magnificent in the moonlight, although the ridges were not clearly discernible. There were also white clouds gathering there which seemed to merge into the moonlight, so that only by gazing fixedly at them could one make out which were clouds and which mountains. For although the clouds and the mountains were both white and glistening, since the moon was behind the clouds their brightness emanated from within, whereas the brightness of the mountains was caused by the moonlight reflected on the snow, so that the effect was different. This was only the case, however, regarding the immediate vicinity, and as the mountains stretched further and further away towards the east, one could only see that the sky was white, the mountains white and the clouds white, without being able to differentiate between them.

Gazing at this scene of intermingled snow and moonlight Lao Can remembered the lines of Xie Lingyun:

"The bright moon shines on the gathering
snow,
The north wind is keen and sad."

* * *

The next morning he went to the bank to have another look and noticed that the two boats used to break the ice were now icebound themselves by the side of the river. He questioned some men on the bank and found out that they had tried to break the ice for half the night; but when they broke the ice in front, the river froze up behind them, and when they tried to break the ice behind, the river in front froze up. So today they had given up the attempt. They would wait until the river had frozen hard, and then try to cross the ice, and this was what Lao Can would have to do also. Since he had nothing to do he went for a stroll in the town, and all he saw was a few shops along the main streets and a few tiled houses in the back streets, presenting a most desolate appearance; but since this was characteristic of most places in the north, he did not wonder at it. Then he returned to his room, opened his case and started reading a book.

Translated by Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang

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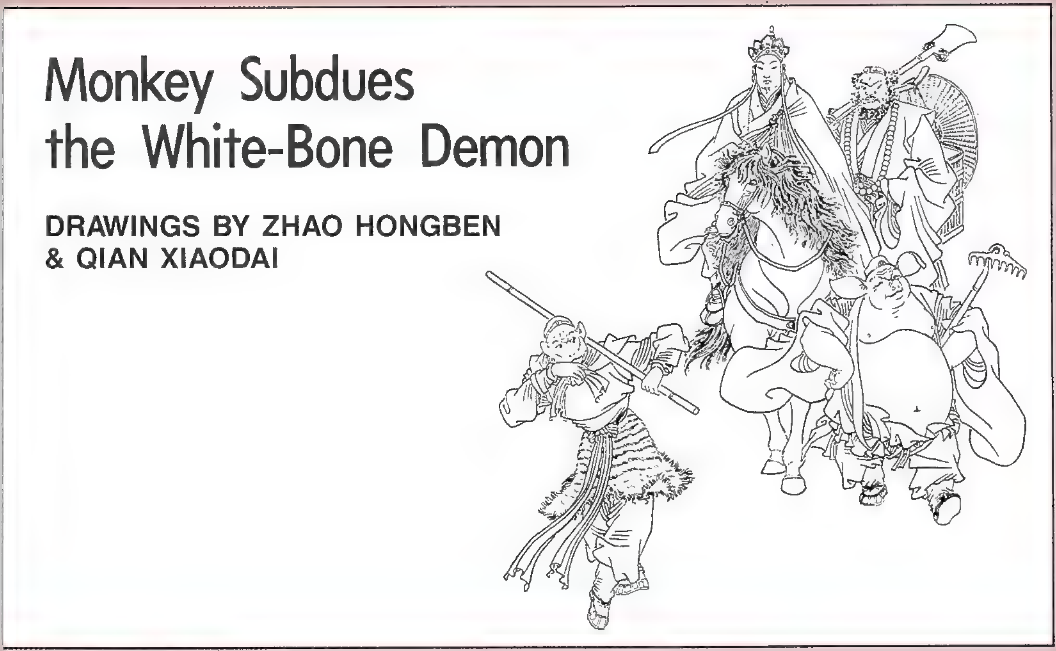
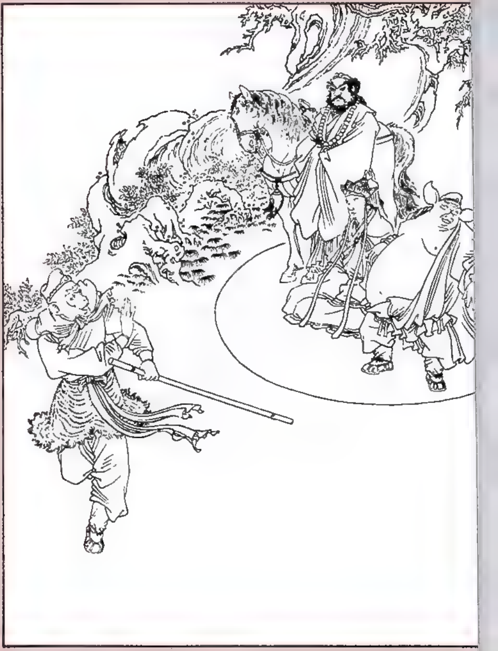
Monkey Subdues the White-Bone Demon

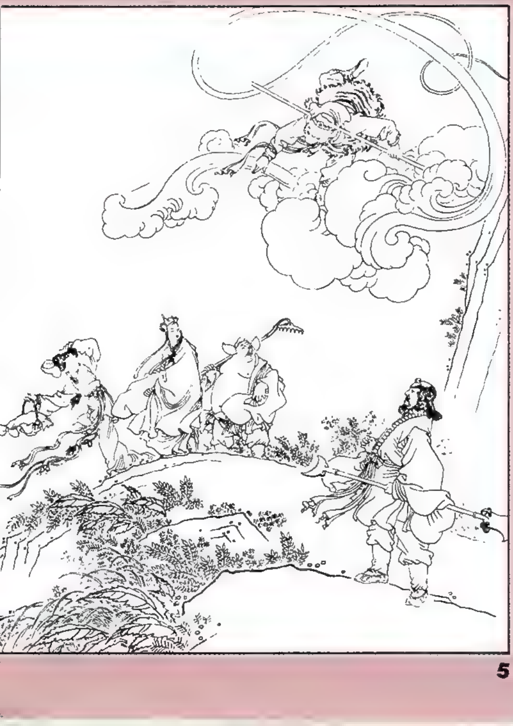
DRAWINGS BY ZHAO HONGBEN & QIAN XIAODAI





Some of China's best-loved folk-tales revolve around the historical journey to India made by the monk Xuan Zang in the Tang dynasty (618-907). In order to acquire Buddhist scriptures and texts from their country of origin and study them there at the great monastery of Nalanda, the monk underwent many privations and adventures along his route, which took him through barren wastes along the Silk Road. He was away from China for around twenty years. China's storytellers wove tales around the reports of his exploits, embroidering them in the process, and passed them down orally over the centuries until they were immortalized by the Ming-dynasty writer Wu Cheng'en (c. 1500-1560) in his novel *Journey to the West.* This, in its turn, fuelled a wealth of operas and dramas.

Part of the charm of these tales lies in the vivid and well-developed characters of the main protagonists. Apart from the gentle, saintly and unworldly monk, we have Monkey — a fearless, nimble and cunning figure, blessed with supernatural powers — who is generally the real hero of any adventure. The monk's second disciple is Pigsy, a former heavenly general reincarnated by mistake in the form of a pig, naive, lazy, with



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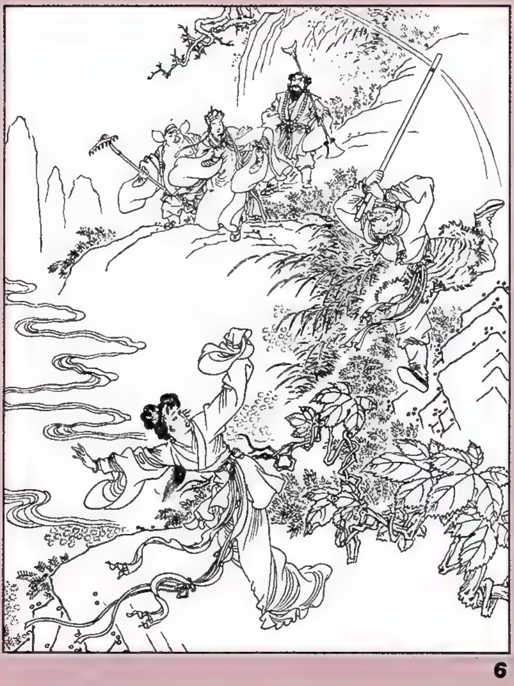

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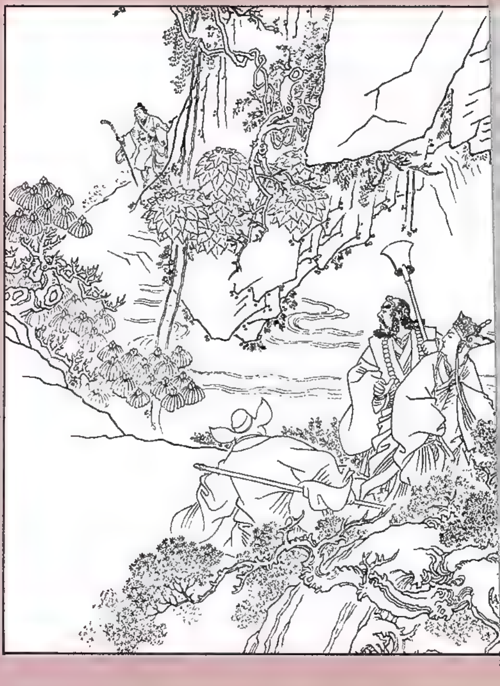

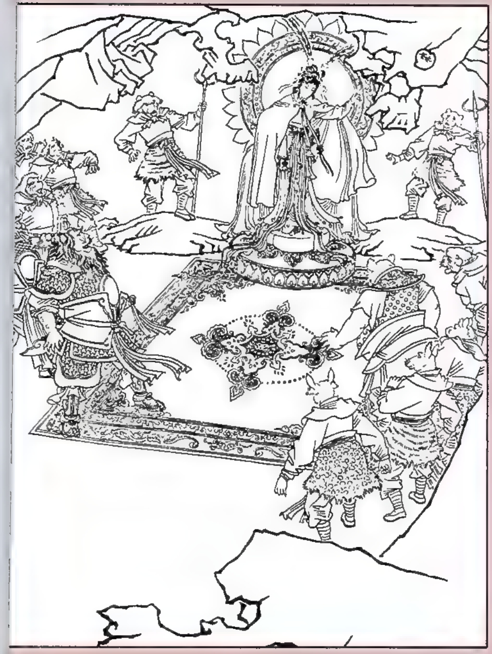

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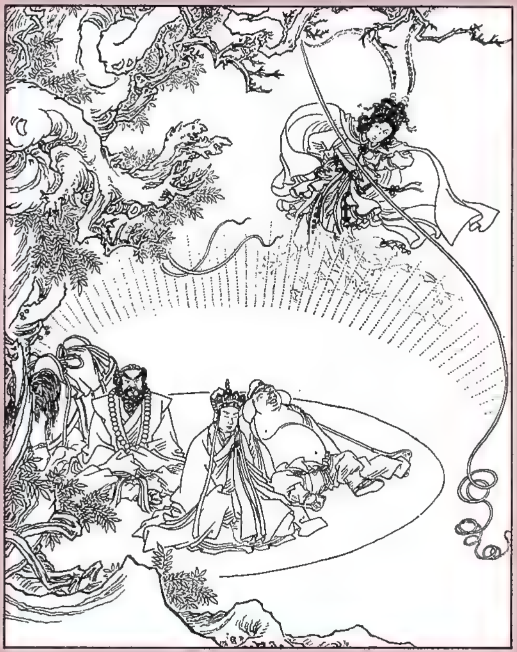

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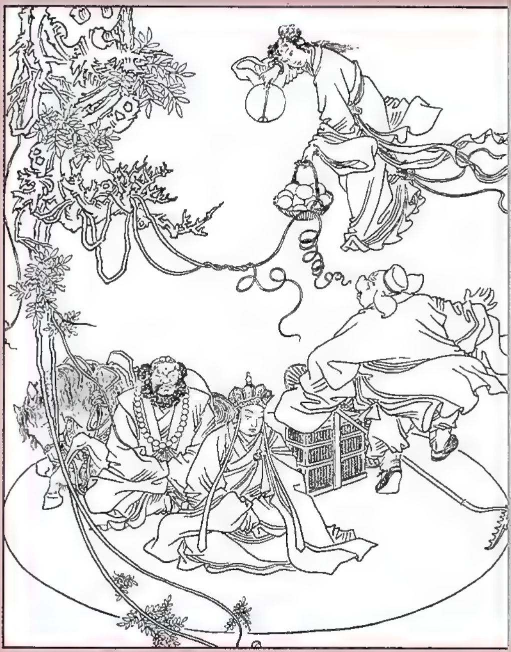

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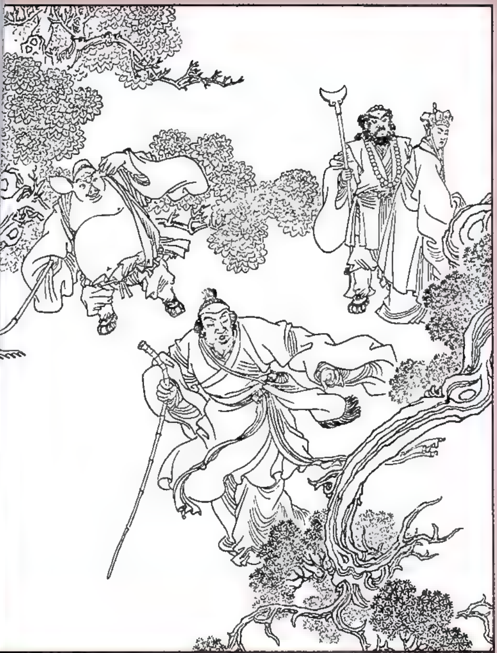
a tendency to both gluttony and lechery, something of a clown, but honest, faithful and a good friend in a tight spot. Sandy, a fallen deity, fierce in appearance but with a commonsense approach, completes the quartet.

The enduring success of these stories is guaranteed by their heady mix of realistic detail with the world of sorcery and magic; Buddhist and Taoist legends and deities are interwoven with the dealings of the common people.

In this episode, the quartet reaches a mist-wreathed, brooding mountainside at dusk. Monkey warns the others to be careful as, given the eerie atmosphere, he thinks there may be demons about. Laughing at his caution, Pigsy complains of hunger. Monkey goes off to scout around and find them some fresh fruit to eat, but first he draws a big circle on the ground around them with his magic gold-clasped cudgel, warning the others to stay within its safety at all costs (1).

Unbeknown to them, the mountain is indeed the abode of the White-Bone Demon (2), who usually takes the form of an elegantly dressed female warrior (shown by the two pheasant feathers on her head). She is delighted when she realizes that she



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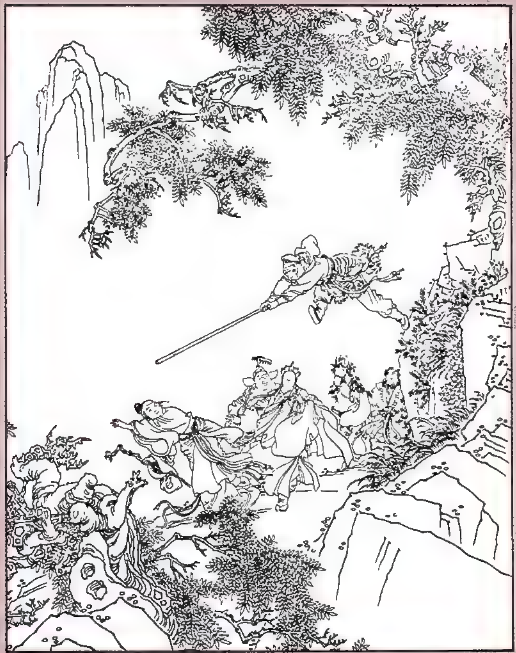

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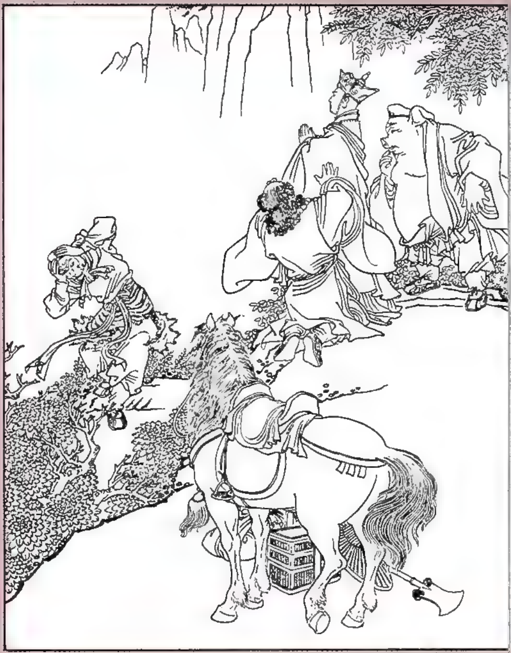

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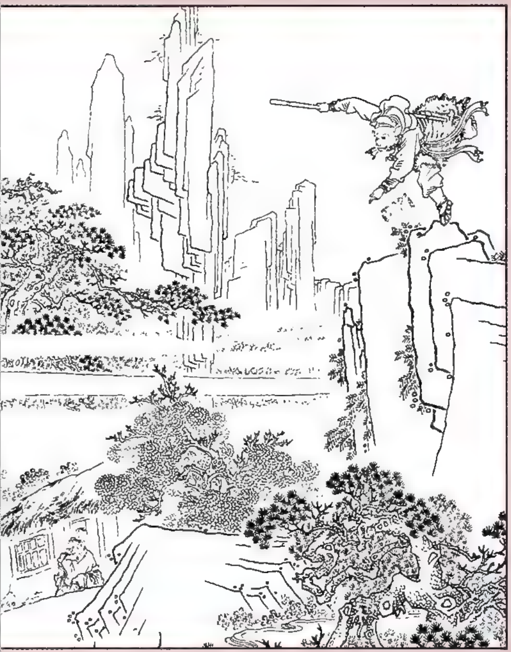
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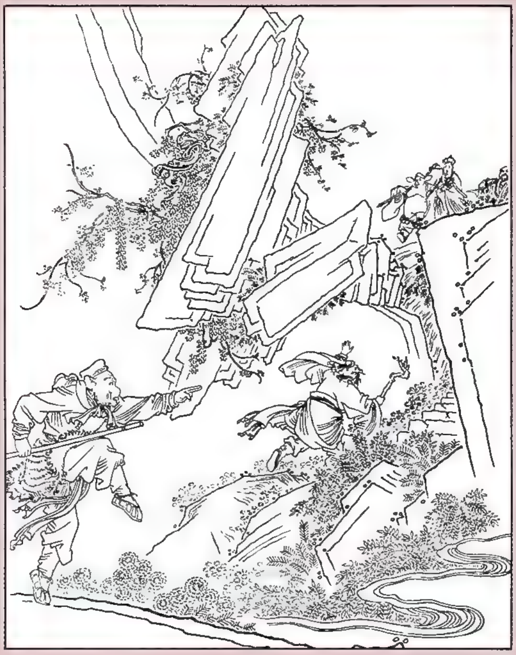
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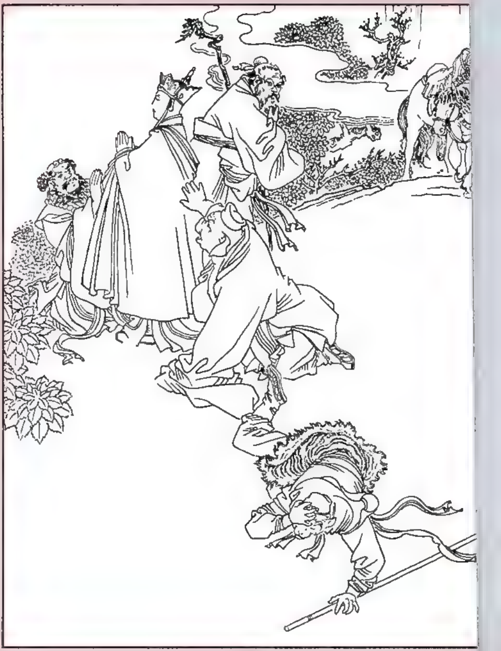


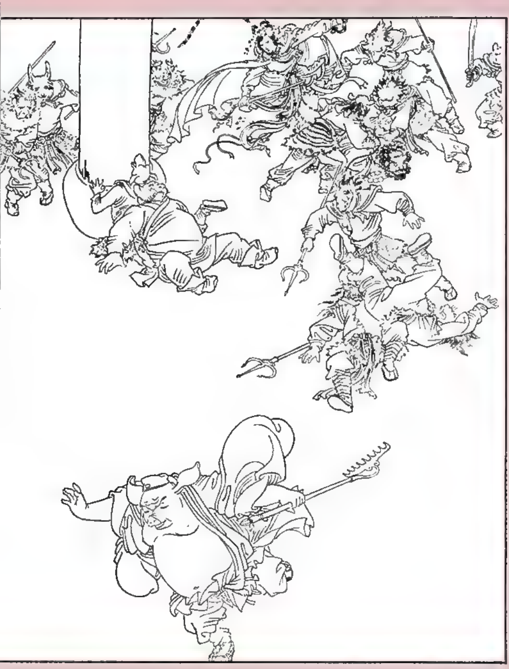
has the monk Xuan Zang practically within her grasp. But, because of Monkey's magic circle, her attempt to capture the monk outright fails (3) and she has to resort to trickery.

First the trio of travellers are approached by a sweet young girl with a basket of freshly-baked bread on her arm. Overcome by the delightful smell, Pigsy leaps out of the ring expectantly (4). The girl tells them she is on her way to a nearby Buddhist temple and Pigsy urges his master to go there to ask for food. As, after some hesitation, they are about to set off with the girl, Monkey reappears and sees through her disguise at once (5). He strikes her lifeless with his cudgel under the horrified eyes of his master, the taking of human life being anathema to a Buddhist (6). But Monkey only succeeds in killing the disguise, not the actual demon.

Undaunted, the White-Bone Demon returns in other forms. First she appears as the girl's mother, complaining bitterly to Xuan Zang of his disciple's brutality (7, 8, 9). Again Monkey returns just in time to save the gullible monk. Xuan Zang becomes upset by what he sees as Monkey's wanton slaying and punishes him by tightening the gold fillet clamped around Monkey's forehead by the magic of the gods to bring him under control (10).

Next it is the girl's father who comes on the scene (11, 12). The sequence of events is repeated as the deluded monk tries to convince Monkey that he should be compassionate, even with demons. Again the evil spirit escapes. Now thoroughly incensed, Xuan Zang banishes Monkey to his home on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, where Monkey is king (13). Monkey exhorts Pigsy and Sandy to take good care of their master (14).

The rest of the party move on to the Buddhist temple to seek shelter (15). No sooner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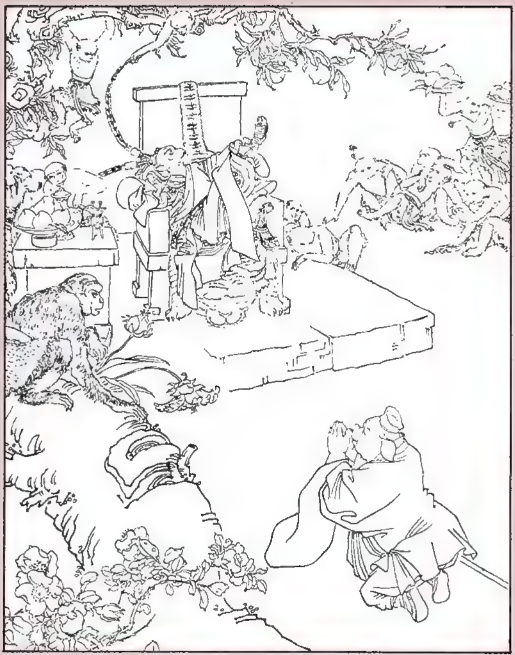
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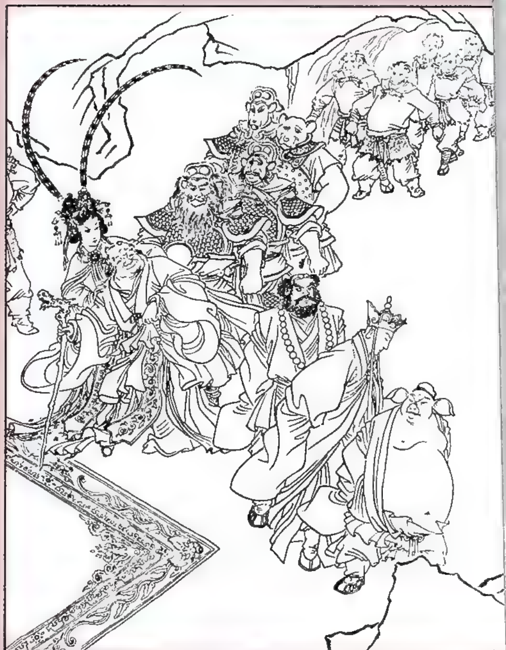

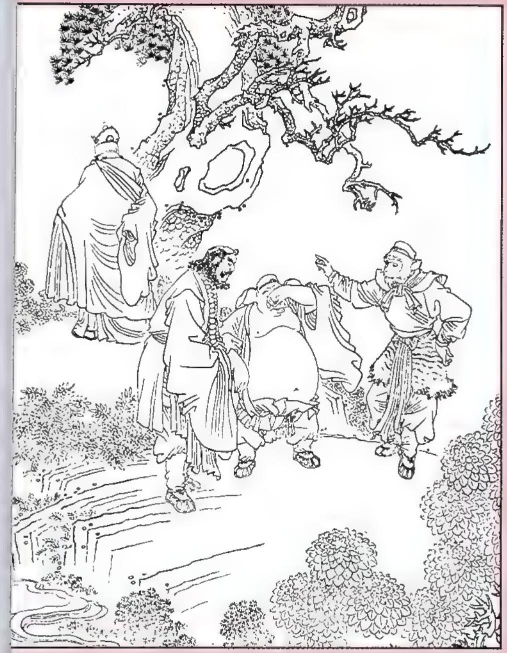

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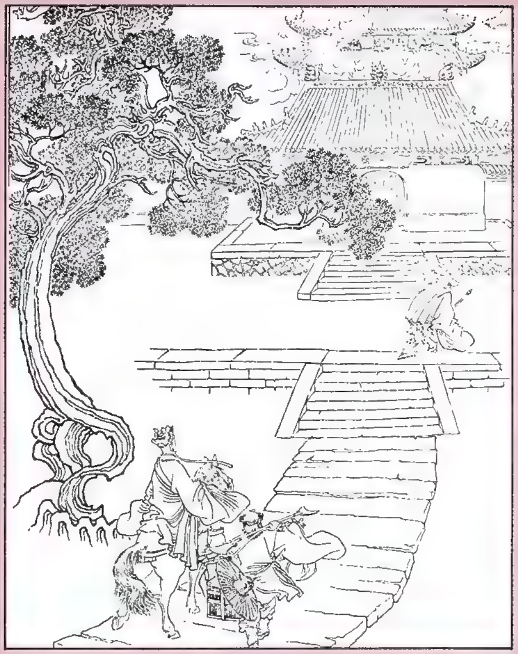

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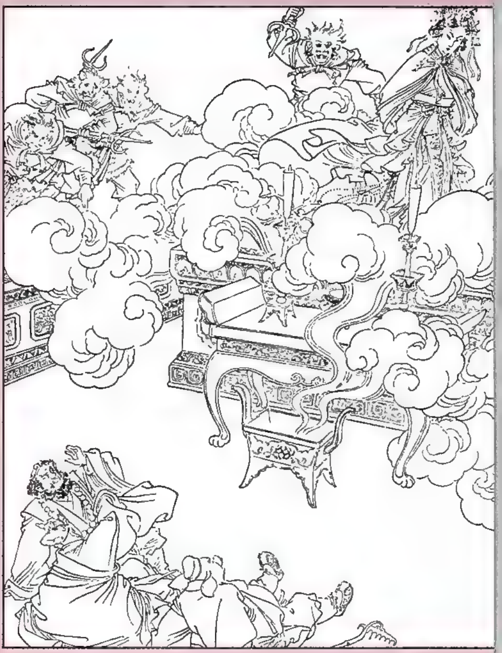

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are they inside than they hear demonic laughter and the sacred images turn into demons and monsters before their eyes (16); the temple is itself nothing more than another illusion to ensnare the monk, who is promptly captured along with Sandy. Pigsy flees to seek assistance (17).

Monkey, now at ease in his kingdom, pretends to be offended and is deaf to all appeals for help (18). In the end, Pigsy storms out determined to make a last-ditch attempt to rescue his poor master, during the course of which he is himself taken prisoner. As soon as Pigsy leaves, Monkey prepares for battle and somersaults high into the air to reach the trouble spot in double-quick time.

Back on the mountain, the White-Bone Demon and her entourage are preparing to feast on the flesh of the monk as they believe this will give them immortality. They are just waiting for the arrival of the demon's mother, the Golden Toad Fairy. But as the old matron is being carried to the party in her sedan chair, she is recognized and intercepted by Monkey; he kills her and her escort and disguises himself as the dowager demon. Arriving at the banquet (19), he cleverly gets his proud 'daughter' to explain the ruses she used to trick Xuan Zang, at which the monk realizes the full extent of his folly in sending Monkey away in disgrace.

It all ends in a free-for-all when Monkey discloses his true identity. Thanks to Monkey's magic and his monkey army (20), Sandy and Pigsy also fighting bravely (21), the White-Bone Demon is defeated once and for all and reverts to a heap of white bones.

The quartet resume their journey. Monkey, once more forgiven, leads the way with undiminished self-confidence (22). C

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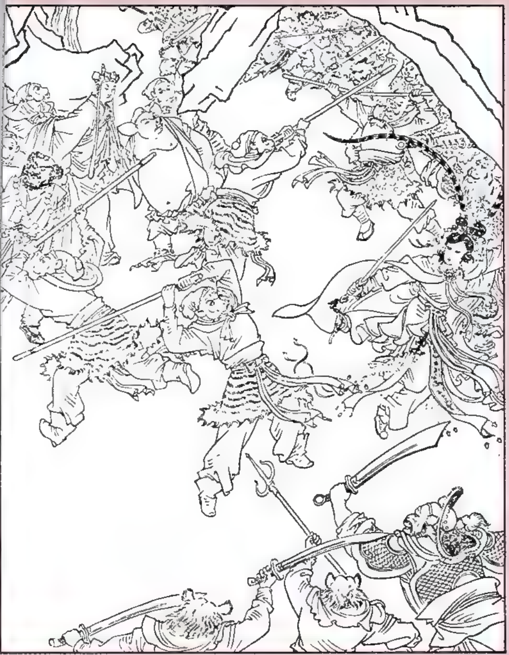

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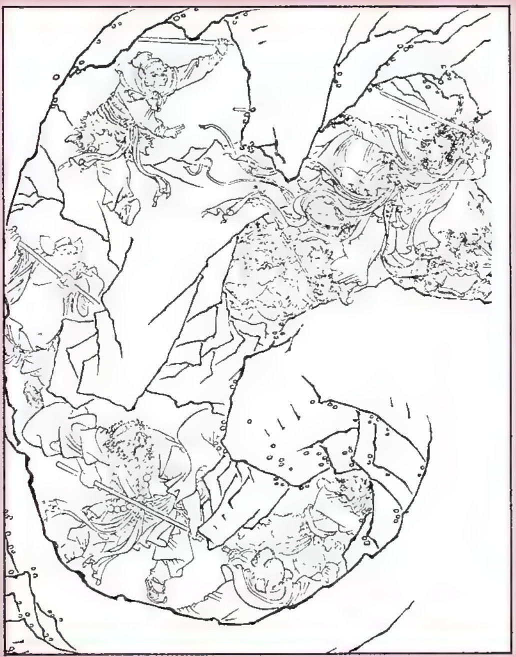

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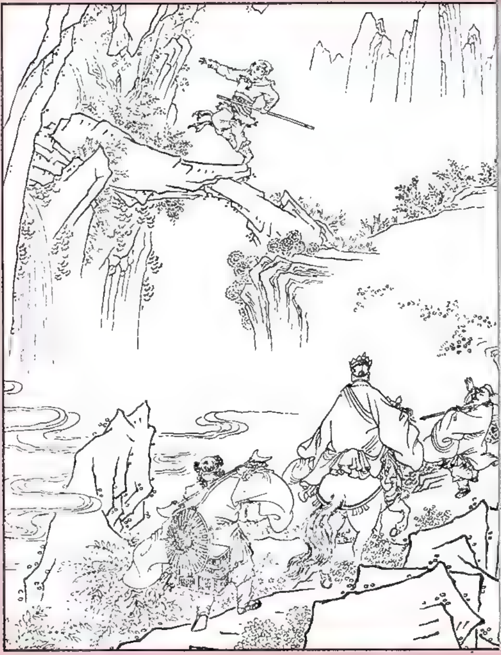

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Naxi lacemaker (by Kader Mallek)

Yi women near Dali (by Kader Malle

The Yulongxue (Jade Dragon Snow) Mountains are said to represent a dragon covered with silvery scales, and their thirteen snow-covered peaks like white jade certainly create an atmosphere of enchantment as they tower up behind Lijiang. This small town is situated 196 kilometres north of Dali in Yunnan Province. You leave Dali in the morning to arrive in Lijiang by evening. The scenery between the two places is superb; fields of wheat glint in the sunlight, throwing off a thousand sparks as they are swept by the wind.

Lijiang is inhabited by the Naxi and by Han Chinese, but scattered in the mountains you can also find members of the Yi minority, particularly the Black Yis or 'Lolos' as they are known locally. In Kunming we had visited the Yunnan Provincial Museum in an effort to find out more about the minorities of Yunnan: a few names, a few costumes, but nothing about their religion or traditions. Our aim in coming to Lijiang was to meet and perhaps get to know more about the Yi.

The highest peak, Shanzidou — at 5,596 metres shrouded in snow year-round — dominates Lijiang with its grandeur, but the countryside round about is also highly picturesque. So too is the old part of the town through which one should stroll to see how the Naxi people live and work. You walk between small wooden houses; large windows give on to the narrow street where passers-by go from tailor to barber, from dentist to baker, from lacemaker to faith-healer....

Having turned my ankle, I was finding walking painful, so I had no hesitation about entering a place which was identified as a clinic by the red cross on its facade. The doctor manipulated my foot so skilfully that I was practically free of pain by that same evening, the swelling had gone down and I was able to walk. I have never regretted this experience of Chinese-style medicine. I understood that the doctor had studied acupressure and acupuncture in Shanghai.

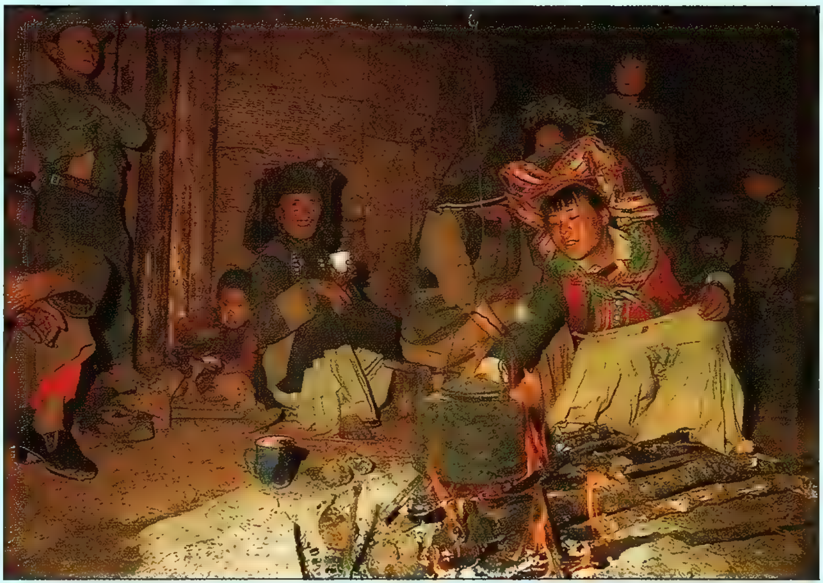
Speaking of doctors, everybody in Lijiang knows Dr He, who lives in the village of Baisha on the plain about six kilometres north of the town. He receives people in his clinic which has in fact become something of a pilgrimage spot for travellers. You walk for two hours through the countryside, the people, the scenery, the very quality of the air making this a very pleasant ramble. Dr He's clinic is easy to find thanks to his sign which proclaims in several languages: 'The Herbal Medicine Clinic of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains'. He welcomed us most kindly, expressing himself well in English. We exchanged a few courtesies and he offered us good tea and a host of information on our surroundings.

We asked him about the Yi, where they live and so on, and he pointed out the mountain (very accurately, as it turned out!). We would have liked to have a letter written in their own language to help us approach them. He warned us that they are animists and that, if we took photos of them, they would believe we were stealing their souls. Despite everything, he wished us good luck and gave us some roots collected from the slopes of the mountains to give us energy during our long hikes.

Just five kilometres north of his village, at Yufeng (Jade Summit) Temple, there is a famous camellia five hundred years old which is said to be covered with hundreds of blooms in early spring. To reach it, you go north until you come to a village, then climb some way up the mountain to where the majestic tree grows in the temple courtyard. A calm-faced, smiling lama (Lijiang's temples are or were mainly associated with the Red Hat or Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism) offered us tea and honey. After a long pause for reflection in this peaceful place, we retraced our steps to Lijiang in the fading light.

We were still no nearer to knowing how to approach the Yi. They came into Lijiang regularly, in fact we encountered some of them every day. The women were easy to recognize with their remarkable

girl. Lijiang (by Sylvie St. Laurent)



Yi mountain-dwellers (by Kader Mallek)

headgear, their long skirts and short embroidered jackets. Before marriage they wear head-dresses with colourful embroidery but then, as married women, they switch to plain black.

In the end we decided that I, as a woman, might succeed better on my own. I spoke to two young girls who seemed less forbidding than some of those from our previous attempts, and managed to establish contact. I learnt that it was about thirty kilometres to their village and, when I asked where they lived, they gestured that I should follow. I pointed out my companion who was watching our progress from the corner of his eye. They laughed – he could come too! Without knowing where we were going exactly, without time for any preparations, we followed them. We could hardly do anything else in view of the time we had been waiting for such an opening.

They loaded up their donkeys and we set off, first across fields and through villages, then over the open mountainside, for more than eight hours. We eventually found ourselves behind the highest peak, its snowfields and glaciers truly very impressive. This mountain is the first thing to catch the eye practically throughout the whole of the region, but to see it so close from another angle was a breathtaking experience. As was the rest of the scenery: from the heights we looked down on to the plain, the cultivated land, herds of goats....

We faithfully followed our guides, who were well protected from the sun by their large head-dresses. The tinkling of the donkeys' bells, the sound of the wind, the scent of the flowers made us forget the difficulties, especially our thirst, at least for a while. The Yi girls picked white blossoms which they ate to assuage their own thirst, and gave us some to try. Yes! We have to report that, in China, we ate rhododendrons! We stopped off to rest in the shade and got our breath back to the background music of the jew's harps which our guides carried on chains around their necks.

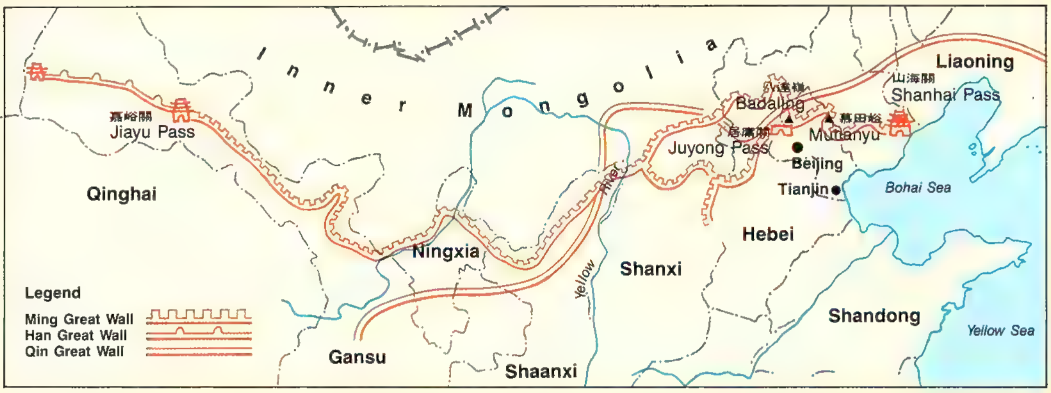
At a certain point a man joined our mini-caravan. He very pleasantly tried to make conversation, but he was difficult to understand. It was to his village that we were headed. It turned out to consist of about six houses of baked earth, one of which was larger than the others. And there the villagers had gathered to welcome us.

So there we were with everybody around the fire: grandmother, grandfather, children and lots of grandchildren, including our young guides. We spent an unforgettable evening at home with these Yi people. They offered us soup, potatoes, *zanba* (barley meal) and tea. The father brought out his rice wine and his radio, and they sang for us. It was such a pity that we could only communicate by sign language. We would have liked to know whether they were indeed animists, especially as they seemed not at all bothered by our taking photographs. On the contrary, they washed their hands and faces and grouped themselves in front of us wearing their most resplendent head-dresses. Without knowing their language, we had to content ourselves with these few hours spent in their company. They were poor and dirty, but generous in the extreme. They had enough to eat their fill, and their children had nicely rounded cheeks. A mountain spring watered their fields.

We rated the 'master bedroom' for the night, while everybody else piled into the adjoining room. The following morning we took our leave with regret. We had absolutely nothing with us and, as they had to get their supplies from the town a day's walk away, we could not presume to eat their provisions. Nor could we promise to return the day after. We therefore prudently returned to Lijiang by the same route which, in fact, seemed easier on the way back, more downhill than uphill. The vegetation was impressive, particularly the flowers: the mountain slopes were a mass of azaleas, peonies and rhododendrons, their brilliant colours contrasting with the greens of the foliage.

Returning to Lijiang, we had at least learnt a little more and come face to face with the Yi people who live on the other side of the Yulongxue Mountains.

Translated by Jenny Marsh



The Great Wall

When the rulers of the various states of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (7th to 5th century B.C.) began to build defensive walls across their territory, they unknowingly took the first steps in the construction of the Great Wall, which would take over 2,500 years. After he united China, the Qin emperor Shihuang linked up and extended the walls during his reign (221-207 B.C.). They ran through northern China from Liaoning to Gansu, stretching for over five thousand kilometres.

Later many dynasties renovated the walls, adding to their length, with the Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) and Ming (1368-1644) contributing the greatest efforts. The Ming dynasty, in particular, carried out large-scale construction and renovation of the Great Wall, which at that time extended for over six thousand kilometres from Hebei's Shanhai Pass in the east to Gansu's Jiayu Pass in the west. More solidly built of brick and stone, a large part of the Ming-dynasty wall is still in good shape, unlike the walls of rammed earth built by earlier dynasties.

We would like to introduce the most famous sections and passes open to the general public, accessible by bus and train. These are Badaling, Juyong Pass, Mutianyu, Shanhai Pass and Jiayu Pass.

Badaling

Like Juyong Pass and Mutianyu, the Badaling section is situated on the outskirts of the greater Beijing area and built on precipitous terrain. About sixty kilometres northwest of Beijing, this is the best-preserved and most frequented section. The building techniques of the Ming dynasty were greatly improved compared with former times, and the section at Badaling is also the thickest, highest and most solid of the entire Great Wall; averaging 7.8 metres high, 6.5 metres wide at the foundation and 5.8 metres wide at the top.

Juyong Pass

Ten kilometres south of Badaling, this was once the 'north gate' to Beijing and centre of a garrison town. The six-kilometre-long section is built in a scenic ravine fifteen kilometres long. At the centre of the pass is a large white marble platform, known as the Cloud Terrace, with an archway engraved with religious bas-reliefs and Buddhist texts in six languages — Sanskrit, Tibetan, Tangut, Mongolian, Uygur and Chinese.

Mutianyu

This newly-opened section is over sixty kilometres northeast of Beijing, about the same distance as between Badaling and the capital. It is hoped that Mutianyu will divert some of the crowds from Badaling. Surrounded by mountains, the 2.25-kilometre section has walls even wider than those at Badaling and arrow slots on both sides. There are also pits at the foot of the wall designed to halt the advance of enemies' horses. Cable cars on a 700-metre cable system are now available to transport visitors up to the viewing point.

Shanhai Pass

The eastern end of the Ming Great Wall, the fort at the pass and the connecting section of wall are situated northeast of Qinhuangdao in Hebei at a strategic point, with the Yanshan Mountains to the north and the Bohai Sea to the south. The well-preserved fort has four gates. The one to the east is the most magnificent, topped with a two-storey tower designed for archers to repulse enemy attacks.

To the north of the pass, the Jiaoshan section snakes over the plain before it bestrides Mount Jiaoshan, its highest point, affording a fine view of the Shanhai Pass and the Bohai Sea. To the south is Laolongtou (Old Dragon Head) where the Great Wall enters the sea. This is where the famous Ming general Qi Jiguang built a stone fortress linked to the Great Wall in 1579 to defend against enemies approaching at low tide, or across the frozen water in the winter. The fortress has collapsed, but huge granite blocks forming part of its base still lie half-submerged in the shallow water.

Jiayu Pass

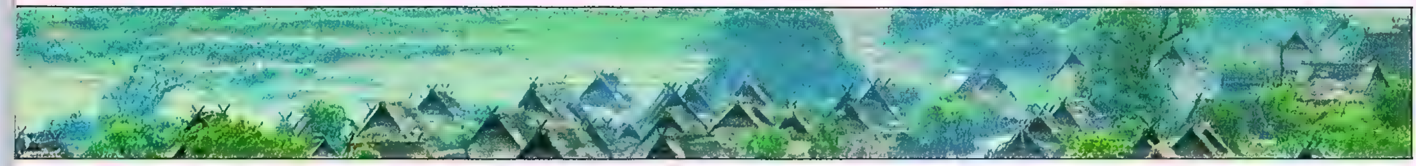
Located in the southern suburbs of the present-day city of Jiayuguan (which grew up around it), this fort and the adjoining wall section form the western end of the Ming Great Wall in northwestern Gansu. In order to defend their territory against the ousted Yuan rulers, who tried to force their way back into the Central Plains from the north, the Ming rulers reinforced and extended the existing wall, starting with Jiayu Pass in 1372. Sheltered by Mount Heishan in the north and the Qilian Mountains in the south, the fort covers an area of over 33,000 square metres and is encircled by two sets of walls, complete with watch towers, gate towers and bowmen's turrets.

Average Climatic Conditions of Awa Mountains

		Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Cangyuan	Temperature (°C)	10.7	12.4	15.9	18.9	21.0	21.6	21.3	21.3	20.6	18.5	14.9	11.7
	Rainfall (mm)	25.0	16.1	18.8	44.5	155.3	306.8	362.5	334.4	201.4	162.8	80.0	33.6
Menglian	Temperature (°C)	13.2	14.8	18.1	21.3	23.3	23.7	23.3	23.1	22.5	20.6	17.2	14.1
	Rainfall (mm)	19.8	9.6	13.2	33.9	134.7	207.9	257.6	303.2	165.2	137.0	53.7	27.6
Ximeng	Temperature (°C)	10.3	12.5	15.7	17.6	17.9	17.7	17.4	17.6	17.4	15.8	13.0	10.6
	Rainfall (mm)	22.4	16.4	16.5	66.8	201.4	487.1	720.7	592.9	285.7	207.3	81.7	39.9
Lancang	Temperature (°C)	12.5	14.3	17.6	20.6	22.7	23.0	22.7	22.6	22.0	20.1	16.4	13.2
	Rainfall (mm)	25.0	11.4	16.0	35.1	172.1	260.4	349.0	323.3	181.9	152.9	70.2	29.1
Lincang	Temperature (°C)	10.7	13.0	16.2	18.9	20.8	21.2	21.1	21.0	20.2	18.0	14.3	11.1
	Rainfall (mm)	14.5	12.2	18.5	29.3	96.9	187.4	257.7	227.3	136.9	119.6	43.7	15.1

(Continued from page 14)

The Awa Mountains — Abode of the Va



dryland rice, beans, potatoes, tobacco, sugarcane, tea and fruits which do well at high elevations such as mangoes and jackfruit took its place.

On my way back to the county seat I detoured to see the Hege Stockade not far from the highway. It was more affluent than the other villages I saw, and all the dwellings there had tiled roofs and were built of wooden planks, each about fifty centimetres wide. The dress of the women there is most stylish — they wear head-dresses with silver ornaments with a plum-blossom motif, and colourful blouses and skirts. Strings of multi-coloured beads round their waist and huge silver earrings complete the effect.

Petticoat Government

The following day I went to visit Haidong Stockade on the other side of the mountain range. I rode thirty kilometres on a bus, got off at Nanlei, and then walked for forty-five minutes to get to my destination.

Cotton grows in profusion in Haidong and all the villagers there wear a knee-length *sarong*-type skirt made of home-spun cloth. Silver earrings and bracelets are of course *de rigueur* for the womenfolk.

Here too I received a cordial welcome. At the invitation of the village headman, I sat round the fire with him and his family that evening, sipping a kind of wine made from red rice. The Va people say that 'no ceremony is complete without wine' and insist on entertaining guests with wine from a tiny bamboo tube.

The headman told me that women rule supreme in Haidong, having the final say in household matters. The nuptial customs also demonstrate the superiority of women there. A man usually goes to live with his wife's family, the son of the headman being no exception. On the wedding night the groom is usually accompanied by someone who stays in the room with the newly-weds as a witness to what they may pledge one another. If some day the husband and wife should quarrel, that same person will be asked to mediate.

Now the headman, who had grown flushed and mellow, became even more talkative. He said his father used to be the chieftain of the Haidong tribe. Talking about hunting for human heads as offerings to the deity of the rice crops, a practice which once prevailed in Haidong too, he told me the site of the gruesome offering was the very place where I had entered the stockade.

Film Fame for Yuesong

I stayed in Haidong for a couple of days before leaving for Ximeng County. The town of Ximeng itself is perched two thousand metres above sea-level. Sixteen kilometres' walk west along a mountain path takes you to what has become the most celebrated stockade of the Va people — Yuesong. Most of the films made about the tribe seem to have been shot there. On the day of my arrival I came across a group of people from a film studio who had come to look for suitable locations. Apart from the fact that the simple lifestyle has been kept intact, they found the landscape most enchanting. The huge banyan tree outside the village alone has appeared countless times on the Chinese screen. The villagers there seem to have got used to filming and so, when they are asked to pose for a picture, they now actually demand payment.

I had the good fortune to get to know the leading magistrate of Ximeng County who of course knew a lot of people there and took me to call on several families. As I was drinking wine and talking to people in one household, I looked up and noticed a row of wooden structures below the thatched roof which held bamboo tubes, each about three metres long. My new acquaintance said these were containers for rice and other grain. The end of each bamboo tube is sealed to protect the contents from rodents. If there is a fire, people just give them a push and they will roll out through the roof opening and away from the house on fire. He also joked that, if you want to know how much food grain a family has, you need only walk into the house and tap these bamboo tubes.

Yuesong was the last stage of my journey through the Awa Mountains. I departed sated with vivid pictures of the life and lifestyle of the Va people of today, still barely touched by the modern world.

Translated by Ren Jiazhen

NEWS

Adding to Xi'an's Hotels

Scheduled to soft-open in October is the **Holiday Inn Xi'an,** which is located at the old city's East Gate. The hotel will offer conference facilities, business centre, health club, sauna, indoor pool, and Chinese and Western restaurants. Until March 1989 the hotel will apply a discount giving a room tariff of US$50.

Two smaller foreign-managed joint-venture hotels are among this year's new openings in the Shaanxi capital. The 110-room **Hawaii Hotel** has public facilities including Western and Cantonese restaurants and an English-style pub, and offers an opening discount of 25% on the room rate of US$70. The **New World Hotel,** located in the heart of the city near the Bell Tower, is a renovated building with a new extension. Facilities include a Cantonese restaurant, coffee shop and disco. There is a 30% opening discount on the room prices, which range between US$55 and 85.

Tang Temple Excavated in Shaanxi

A Taoist temple dating from the Tang dynasty (618-907) has been unearthed on Mount Lishan twenty-five kilometres east of the provincial capital, Xi'an. The temple covers 1,500 square metres and includes a main hall, two pavilions and a 158-metre-long winding corridor.

The location of the temple corresponds to historical records and inscriptions on pottery tiles at the site. Coins and white marble statues found indicate that the temple was constructed around 740.

Sino-Pakistani Tourism to Be Developed

A Sino-Pakistani tourism plan has jointly been drafted by the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwestern China and its neighbour Pakistan with a view to boosting tourism development on both sides of the border.

Measures will include the shooting of a TV film about the ancient Silk Road, the building of more tourist facilities along the China-Pakistan Highway, and improvement of communications and transport services. Also, efforts are to be made to improve the road on the Chinese side of the border from the Kunjirab Pass to Kashi (Kashgar). When completed, the highway will be able to take heavier vehicles.

Southern Song Site in Fujian

Archaeologists have confirmed that the village of Zhaojiabao in southern Fujian Province overlies an ancient city of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). Walls six metres high and two metres thick and four gateways can still be seen at the site thirty-eight kilometres from Zhangzhou.

It is believed that this is where the last emperor of the Southern Song fled to hide in 1278 when Kublai Khan's Mongol army invaded the north. The city is said to resemble the former dynastic capital, Lin'an (Hangzhou).

Sika Deer Introduced at Thousand Island Lake

Twenty-two sika deer have been given a home on the appropriately named Deer Island in Thousand Island (Qiandao) Lake, a famous tourist area in Zhejiang Province.

The island covers seven hectares and provides an ideal environment for deer. Pavilions, shelters, and deer-viewing corridors have been built on the island, which is situated close to other island reserves for monkeys, civets and birds.

Ancient Mirror Found in Jilin

An 800-year-old bronze mirror with a pattern of flying kites has been excavated at Gongzhuling in Jilin Province.

The round mirror, measuring 18.5 centimetres in diameter, was found in an earthenware jar buried 30 centimetres underground. Its reverse bears four designs of kites being flown, in each case by two people wearing long gowns and with their hair in a bun. One of the kites is in the shape of a wild goose, the other a butterfly. This is believed to be China's earliest illustration of kites.

Chartered Flight to Anhui

In late August this year a chartered flight was launched between Hong Kong and Hefei, capital of Anhui Province. The service operates every Friday using 140-seater MD-82 aircraft. The non-stop flight is the result of cooperation between the Anhui Tourist Bureau, CITS, China Travel Air Service H.K. Ltd. and CAAC Holidays Ltd. It is intended to permit faster and more convenient access to the major tourist attractions of southern Anhui — Mount Huangshan and Mount Jiuhua.

Self-Drive Holiday Programme Initiated

'Hertz Affordable China Safari' — a self-drive holiday programme in China — has been announced jointly by China Travel Service (Macau) Ltd. and Hertz International Ltd., the world's leading car-rental company, in order to promote all-inclusive hotel and car-rental packages in China.

Holidaymakers with a sense of adventure will be able to book self-drive holidays in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. However, they will have to take a special driving test before taking to the Chinese roads since international driving licences are not yet valid in China. It is planned to develop tours of this kind in other parts of the country.

Imaginative Tours from Xi'an

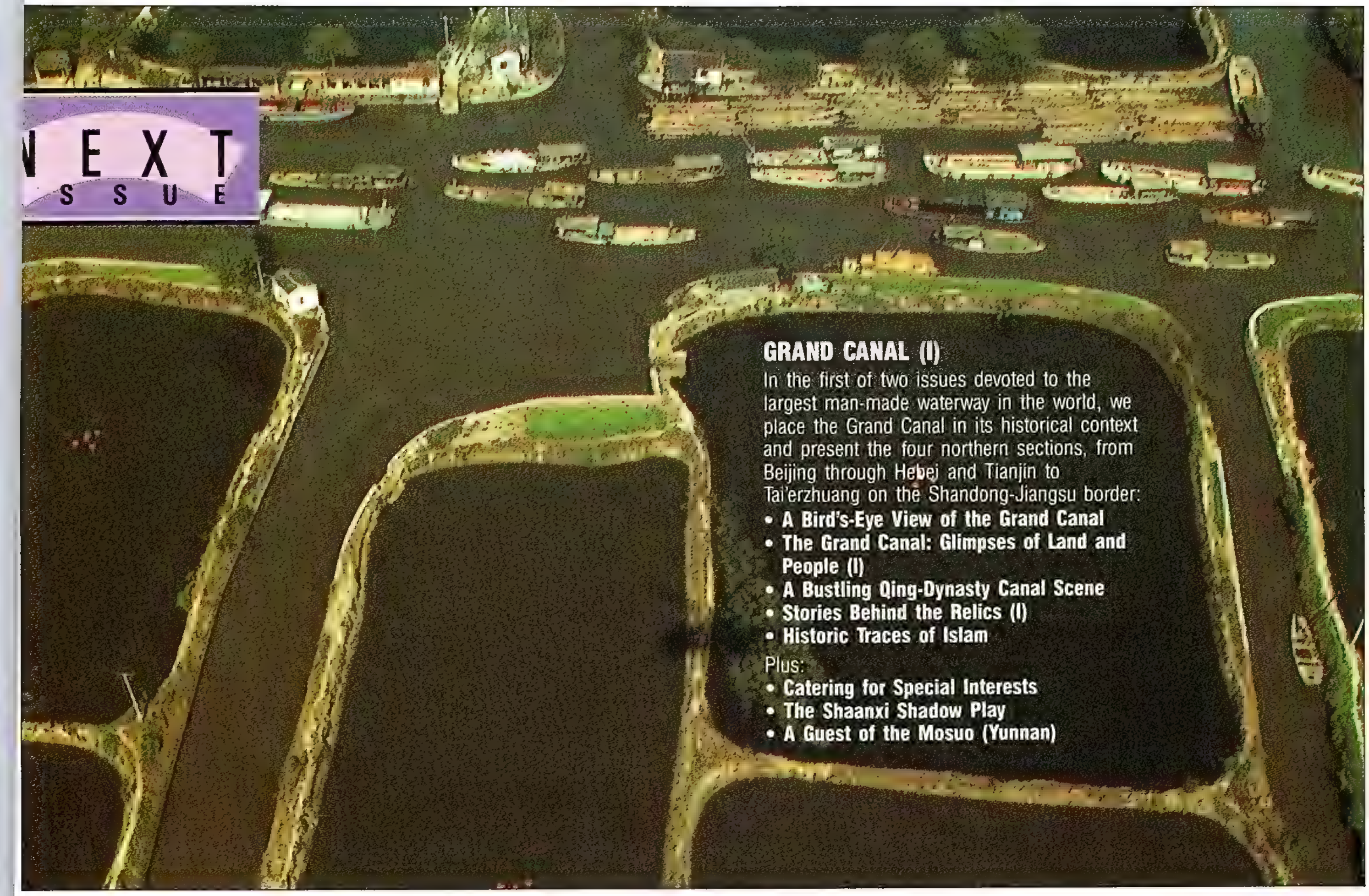
The Xi'an branch of China International Travel Service (CITS) is arranging many unusual special-interest tours this year which it hopes to repeat in 1989. These include 8-day car tours covering 2,200 kilometres, a 5-day martial arts study tour and a 5-day Xi'an city wall marathon. Calligraphy enthusiasts can choose between a 5-day programme or a longer 8-day one which includes visits to nearby calligraphy centres. For the culturally minded, there is a religious and ancient temples tour, as well as a 4-day archaeology study tour which covers a visit to the recent finds at Famen Temple (see CHINA TOURISM No. 97). The mountain area biology tour, a 21-day tour which covers Xi'an, Kunming, Chengdu, Changsha and Guangzhou, involves some camping. There is also a 5-day hot air balloon event. One very special date to note will be the Shaanxi Folk Arts Festival scheduled for the next Spring Festival, which falls at the beginning of February 1989.

Projected Air Links for the North

The present situation whereby Inner Mongolia is something of a blind alley for tour circuits should change in the near future. Negotiations are currently underway to open up an air route between Hohhot and Xinjiang via Lanzhou in Gansu, as well as a direct link with Xi'an in Shaanxi.

New routes to be launched this year are Beijing-Chifeng-Shenyang (the latter two cities in Liaoning) and Hohhot-Beijing-Hailar-Harbin (the latter city in Heilongjiang). A further two routes have already been confirmed for 1989 — Hohhot-Beijing-Hangzhou and Hohhot-Beijing-Guilin.

In anticipation of the expanded service, a new airport terminal has been built at Hohhot and airport facilities have been generally improved.



NEXT
SSUE

GRAND CANAL (I)

In the first of two issues devoted to the largest man-made waterway in the world, we place the Grand Canal in its historical context and present the four northern sections, from Beijing through Hebei and Tianjin to Tai'erzhuang on the Shandong-Jiangsu border:

- **A Bird's-Eye View of the Grand Canal**
- **The Grand Canal: Glimpses of Land and People (I)**
- **A Bustling Qing-Dynasty Canal Scene**
- **Stories Behind the Relics (I)**
- **Historic Traces of Islam**

Plus:

- **Catering for Special Interests**
- **The Shaanxi Shadow Play**
- **A Guest of the Mosuo (Yunnan)**

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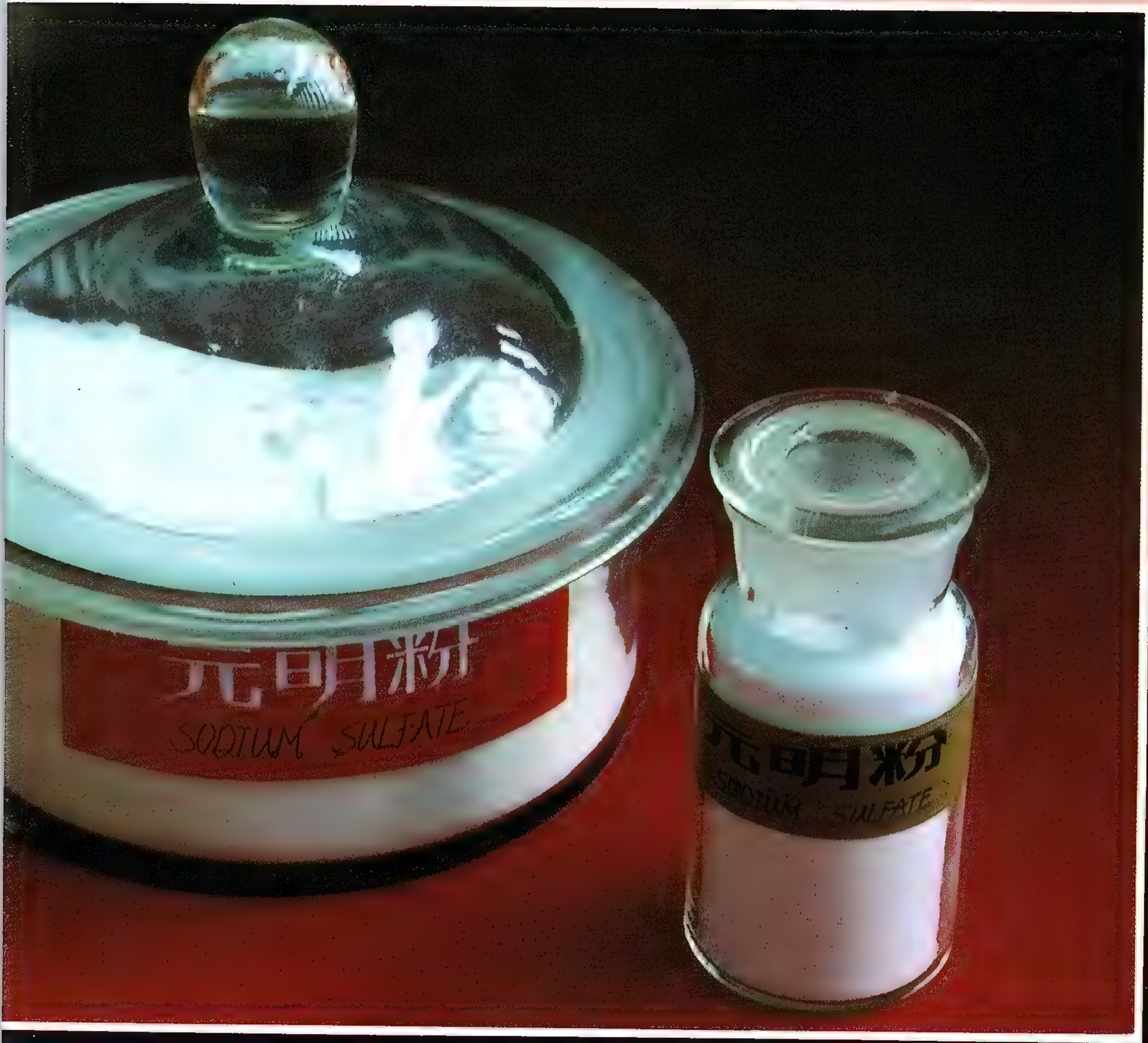

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本公司是經營土產、畜產、農副產品的對外貿易專業公司。長期以來，富於開拓的經營能力、卓著的信譽，不斷贏得各界的關注和信賴。已與幾十個國家和地區建立了穩定的貿易關係。

本公司的經營範圍包括土產品：各類乾果乾菜、蜂蜜及其製品，各種植物飼料、亞麻及其製品，工業用原料等。畜產品：各類裘皮及其製品、羊毛地毯、各種絨毛、豬鬃、各種腸衣等。寧夏的山羊絨、灘羊皮服裝，仿古式羊毛地毯，紅黑瓜子、髮菜、亞麻及其製品，以其優良的品質而馳名中外。

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Business Scope:

Native Produce: various kinds of dried fruits and vegetables, honey and its products, vegetable feedstuffs, flax and flaxen products, and industrial raw materials.

Animal Products: various kinds of fur and fur products, woollen carpets, various kinds of wool and hair, hog bristles, and casings.

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The Ningxia branch of the corporation is approved by the national government. It is specialized in importing and exporting chemical products for Ningxia.

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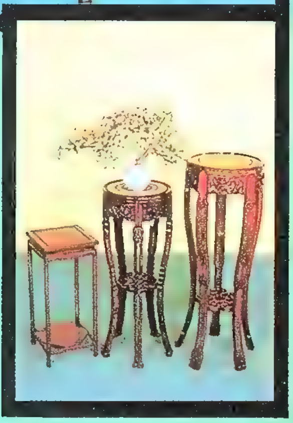

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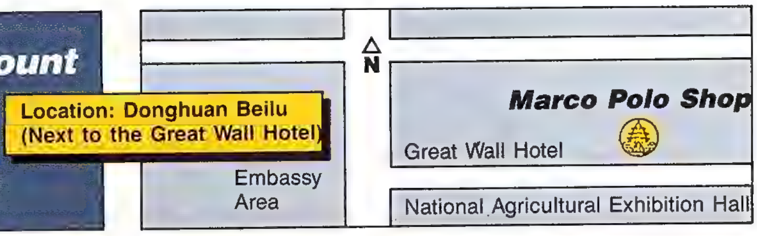
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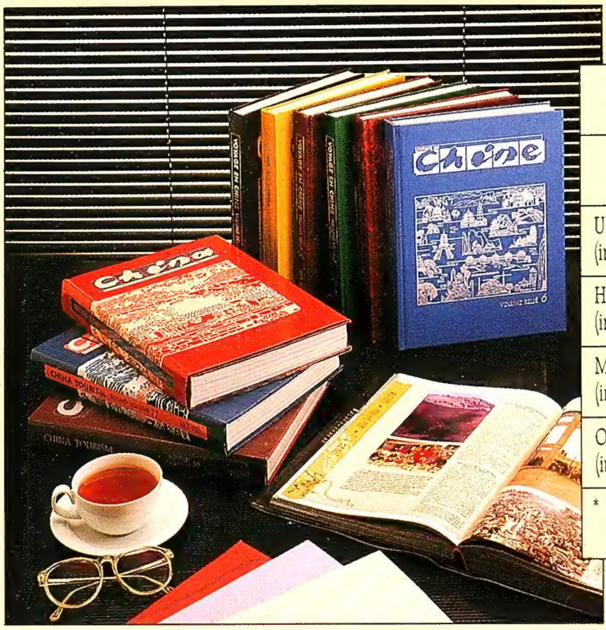

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